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"The State of the Ark: A Material and Iconographic Exegesis of Exodus 25:10-22"

by

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"The State of the Ark: A Material and Iconographic Exegesis of Exodus 25:10-22"

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In Fond Memory of Kaye Rapp

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PREFACE

My study of the ark[1] centers on the materials from which it was constructed. In addition, the iconography of the cherubim became a significant part of that study. My undergraduate degree was in fine art, and training as an artist endowed me with a particular sensitivity to works of the hand. The description of the ark in Exodus 25 provided me with the opportunity to walk through a doorway into the ancient world of "making." And the act of "making" for an artist has the potential for being a profoundly spiritual and transcendent experience.

The question of veracity in Biblical history has become for me an exercise of inquiry over the opportunity for skepticism. When I began my studies at the Bangor Theological Seminary I was much more disposed toward skepticism—in fact, I was horribly informed about theological matters and Biblical history. Now, the very stories in the Hebrew Bible—particularly in the Pentateuch—that I found to be so unbelievable prior to my experiences at BTS compel me to dig deeper; and the deeper I go, the more interesting they all become. I have not suddenly begun to believe in myths (though I am willing to accept that things do happen beyond the realm of empiricism). I ask, *did the miracles need to happen for the fundamental truths and the theological concerns to be of value?* In short, *what do these stories mean?*

1. The portable box, not Noah's boat.

It is not important for me that Moses authored the Pentateuch, parted the Reed Sea, or experienced a theophany on Sinai. Those might be scandalous admissions for a Master of Arts candidate at a seminary, but the permission and the ability to explore the Bible openly, constructively, in all manners—to ask questions about it—have had the collective effect of inspiring me deeply. In the wake of graduation I look forward to the new direction my studies at BTS have afforded me. I set sail wholeheartedly into the world of Ancient History, and I look hopefully toward new horizons.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Ann Johnston, who introduced me to Torah and changed the course of my thesis. I am grateful for that. I would like to thank Dr. Marvin Ellison for his patient support and academic guidance during my years at BTS. Dr. Patricia Fagan from the University of Alaska has offered great advice and unfaltering inspiration during the course of our friendship, and her helpful careful reading of my thesis helped me tremendously. Comments made by Tim McCreight greatly improved the sections regarding artisan techniques and metalsmithing. Naturally, a very special thank you goes to Michelle Ellis for her wisdom and guidance from the beginning of our meetings until the day of my presentation. For taking me on as her first master's advisee I am truly thankful.

AUTHORIAL TRADITIONS

This paper is concerned with the sacred ark of the ancient Israelites (the portable box[2]) described in Exodus 25:10-22.[3] Addressed will be the question of what the ark looked like between its itinerancy with the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness until its installation in the temple sanctuary, which was commissioned by Solomon (1 Kgs: 8:6).[4] By comparing the Priestly (P)[5] literary tradition of Exodus 25 (mid first millennium BCE) with the material culture from the time period in which the ark was allegedly built (the late second millennium BCE) it will become apparent that the ark in P was based on already existing strands of tradition. The goal of this study will be to better evaluate the role of the Hebrew Bible as a source of history. By calling on

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2. ark=chest: *'arown* (*Strong's* #727, *BDB*, p.75). In Gn 50:26 *'arown* is used to describe Joseph's sarcophagus. cf. *tebah* denoting Noah's ark constructed from gopher wood (Gn 6:14), and the wicker basket into which Moses was placed as an infant (Ex 2:3).

3. The ark description stands amid other descriptions of the Tabernacle's sacred cultic objects: Ex 25:10-22, ark; 23-30, table; 31-39, lamp stand; Ex 26 describes the Tabernacle.

4. ca. 960 BCE: W.F. Albright, "From the Patriarchs to Moses II: Moses out of Egypt," *Biblical Archaeologist* 36, no. 2 (May 1973): 62; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 218; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 164. Interpolating data from Tyrian and Egyptian sources the 480-year span mentioned in 1 Kings: 6 places the foundation for the First Temple at ca. 965 BCE (ca. 959 for Bright, 967 for Gottwald). While 40 years was a round number for generations, the actual years of a generation were probably 25-30 years.

5. P=Priestly authors. P may have been an Aaronid priest. While P stories appear to come from one author, the collection of laws appears to have come from a group of authors, the Aaronid priesthood, also labeled P: Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper One, 1987), 214.

the methods of Biblical exegesis and archeology, traditions founded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively,[6] the historical accuracy of the ark description in Exodus will be tested.

Modern scholars have challenged the Documentary Hypothesis proposed by theologians in the nineteenth century and famously summarized by the German theologian Julius Wellhausen.[7] The premise of Wellhausen's source theory (that J, E, P and D[8] sources formed the Pentateuch) remains intact, however with serious emendations, including the addition of a Deuteronomistic Historian, who pieced together ancient Israelite histories in books outside of the Pentateuch.[9] The idea that various authors had their hands in the creation of Hebrew Bible is not without criticism (nor is Wellhausen without controversy), yet Wellhausen's methodology relied on evidence, as he "assembled relevant facts and built a reasoned construction upon them."[10] For Wellhausen—and for other historians—the Biblical documents possess strong elements of historic dependability and "rest ultimately on a nucleus of

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6. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 47-48.

7. William A. Irwin, "The Significance of Julius Wellhausen," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 12, no. 3 (August 1944): 164: Wellhausen used data from Graf and De Wette, et al; see also Friedman, *Who?*,164-165; for a summary of the challenges of and changes to the Documentary Hypothesis see Coogan, *Old Testament*, 23.

8. J=Jahwist; E=Elhoist; P=Priestly authors; D=Deuteronomist.

9. Deuteronomistic Historian=DtrH. The Deuteronomistic History posits Deuteronomy + Joshua through 2 Kings was assembled by a school of historians that drew from various sources, writing sometime during the Josianic reforms of the seventh century BCE: Coogan, *Old Testament,* 191-193; Friedman, *Who?* 130-131; Gottwald, 138-139.

10. Irwin, 171; for anti-Semitism in Wellhausen see Coogan, *Old Testament*, 24.

ancient and valid accounts of patriarchal times."[11] We may not be able to rely on the traditions in the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History for objectivity, accuracy, and harmony of sources, but beneath the "integument" of the assembled narratives the bones of history were laid. Albright's comment on the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible remains relevant: "It is decidedly unsafe to downgrade the antiquity of the Mosaic tradition."[12] Some of that history has proven remarkably authentic when held up against archaeological data.

11. Irwin, 166.

12. Albright, "Patriarchs," 58; "Since Moses had probably reached his early manhood within the generation of Akhenaten's death, there is no reason to deny the influence of the Amarna period on Mosaic theology," ibid, 71.

THE STATE OF THE ARK

Some modern renderings of the ark that are based on the description in Exodus 25 portray a stylized gold-covered object that looks more like a miniature Hellenistic temple than an object from the second millennium BCE, the time period when the ark is said to have been built.[13] When illustrating the ark the modern artist should consider artistic motifs, design styles, and material culture consonant not only with the time period of the Exodus, but with the geographic setting as well. Familiarity with the particularities of a culture's design standards is necessary for a broader understanding of that culture. To that end, understanding mid to late second-millennium ancient Near Eastern iconography and its "design language" is essential for any examination of the ark.

The study of ancient literature and languages helps glean meaning from words, and through epigraphy and philology we have come to understand more about ancient religions and cultic practices. In addition, methods of study developed by interpreting iconography have presented opportunities for us to "see through the eyes

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13. For surveys of Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic art see H.W. Janson, *History of Art*. 3rd ed. (New York: Abrams, 1986), Ch. 5; some aspects P's description reflect decorative elements found on late first millennium Cypro-Classical sarcophagi: Vassos Karageorghis, *Ancient Art from Cyprus* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 202-203; the earliest stylistic influences of ark-like structures come from Egypt, e.g. a chest with carrying poles surmounted by a statue of Anubis was found in the tomb of Tutankhamen (d.1323), see photo of Anubis chest in: Nicholas Reeves and Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Valley of the Kings* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 85; the design and materials of Egyptian sarcophagi bear heavily on the genesis of the Israelite ark.

of the ancient Near East."[14] Long before writing was invented religion operated with pictures and symbols[15]; therefore, whoever wishes to learn about ancient Egyptian religion and culture must learn the language of images.[16] Studies utilizing iconography in conjunction with epigraphy and material culture are of growing value to scholars.[17] Uehlinger emphasizes:

> "There is a growing awareness among today's scholars that conventional text-oriented approaches, whether focusing on epigraphic sources or on biblical texts, needs to be supplemented by archaeological evidence and iconographical studies." [18]

The current study is a material and iconographical exegesis of Exodus 25:10-22. By referencing historical sources contemporaneous with ancient Israelite culture (namely second millennium Egyptian) the design of the ark will be "excavated" to exhume its formal characteristics.[19] While the Israelites were in Egypt—from the years of Joseph to Moses—their host culture exerted great influence upon them.[20] The Israelites were doubtlessly influenced by the design motifs and material culture of

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14. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 8.

15. Erik Hornung, "Ancient Egyptian Religious Iconography," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 1711.

16. Ibid., 1729.

17. Keel, *Symbolism*, 8; see also: F. M. Cross, "The Tabernacle," *Biblical Archeologist* 10, no. 3 (September 1947): 47-48; Irwin, 166.

18. Christoph Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for YHWH's Cult Images," in *The Image and the Book*, edited by Karel Van der Toorn (Leuven: Peters, 1997), 99.

19. Regarding the ark's physical appearance and material matrices.

20. 430 years (Ex 12:40); Gn 50:26 tells of the mummification (embalmment) of Joseph illustrating that the Israelites had adapted to Egyptian funerary practices during their years in Egypt; Albright, "Patriarchs to Moses," 71: "Since Moses had probably reached his early manhood within the generation of Akhenaten's death, there is no reason to deny the influence of the Amarna period on Mosaic theology."

their hosts. The nature and consequences of such syncretic activity may be reflected in the oldest traditions in the Hebrew Bible, and the ark tradition is one of those.

Just under a century ago, Julian Morgenstern identified three periods in the lifespan of the ark.[21] The first period coincided with the Israelite wandering through Sinai after departing from Egypt. It stretched through the monarchy of David (who marched the ark into Jerusalem) and closed after it was installed in the First Temple sanctuary commissioned by Solomon. The second period of the ark, according to Morgenstern, paralleled the lifespan of the First Temple and ended with Babylon's destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE. At that time the ark disappeared. The Second Temple at Jerusalem—Morgenstern's third period—likely contained no ark at all.[22]

Morgenstern believed that the description of the ark in Exodus 25:10-22 came from the post-exilic hand of a Priestly author who was projecting an idealization of the ark onto old narratives that coincided with the desert period.[23] Other scholars date the P description to the Babylonian exile, during which time the displaced Jews suffered a great existential and theological crisis due to their dislocation.[24] Other scholars favor a pre-exilic date for P material.[25] Concerns with the dating of P will be addressed in the last section of this paper. Of primary concern is the comparison of

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21. Julian Morgenstern, *The Ark, The Ephod, and the Tent of Meeting* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1945), 229-231.

22. Ibid., 230.

23. Ibid.

24. C.L. Seow, "The Designation of the Ark in Priestly Theology," *Hebrew Annual Review* (1984): 189; Mettinger cited, ibid.

25. Friedman, *Who?* 188-189; Seow, "Ark in P," 189: Hurvitz, Rendsburg, Zevit do not prove a pre-exilic date for P, just the "improbability" of a post-exilic date.

the literary tradition of P (that is, Exodus 25:10-22) with archaeological and art historical data from the second millennium BCE.

Modern commentaries on the ark have tended to focus heavily on the literary traditions that depict the ark "in action."[26] Form-, historical-, and literary-critical methods have uncovered layers of meaning and context revealing the nature of the ark's theology and its cultic uses by the Israelites. The compelling structure of the "Ark Narrative,"[27] offers insight into the nature of ancient Israelite religion. But in all of these modern studies the formal features of the ark are only incidentally mentioned (if they are mentioned at all). The implication of these omissions is clear: if the description of the ark comes from P, which postdates the Exodus, it comes to bear little on any understanding of the wandering ark of Sinai and, for that matter, the ark in Judges, Samuel and Kings. However, the formal aspects of the ark were probably established before P's mid first-millennium emendations.

Since Morgenstern's seminal work, the tendency of historians has been to compare the Israelite ark with analogous cultic objects from other cultures in the ancient Near East, for instance, the *kubbe* (see page 9). It will be helpful to summarize Morgenstern's theory regarding the ark of the desert. By understanding the form and function of "ark-like" objects in the ancient Near East, as well as the

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26. In three contemporary studies literary-, source-, and traditio-critical methods focus on the history of the ark: Antony F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative. (1 Sam 4-6; 2 Sam 6): A Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Study* (SBLS 16. Missoula: SBL and Scholars' Press, 1975); Patrick D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977); C.L. Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 44. Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1989).

27. 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6. The proposed Ark Narrative illustrates the capture of the ark by the Philistines, and the subsequent harrowing of Philistines when YHWH unleashes upon them various plagues.

artisan traditions that were available to the Israelites during their time in ancient Egypt, we may determine the physical attributes of the ark.

THE ARK & ITS SACRED FUNCTION

According to the Exodus narrative texts the design for the ark was passed from YHWH to Moses during Moses' theophany on Sinai. The ark was then constructed, along with the other tabernacle appurtenances, by two gifted Israelite artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab.[28] During this first period of the ark many scholars believe either a cultic figure, a symbol of the deity (or deities), or *betyls* (sacred stones) were kept inside the ark.[29] In addition, the ark might not have been a box at all, rather it could have been a tent-like shrine called a *kubbe*.[30] The *kubbe* traces its provenance to the nomadic Arabian tribes with which the Israelites mingled during their desert wandering.[31] The *kubbe* was mounted onto a saddle and harnessed to a transport animal, such as a camel, which may have been in use by Semitic peoples as early as the thirteenth century BCE.[32] Another tent-like shrine was found during the

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28. Bezalel= "In the Shadow (Protection) of El (God)." Craftsperson named in Ex 31:2-5 who was endowed with the spirit of god and made the cultic objects (see note 2) for the desert tabernacle; Oholiab was named as Bezalel's assistant in Ex 31:6. Oholiab is possibly of Phoenician origin meaning "father is shelter," (ABD, vol.5, 10).

29. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 263; Robert Wenning, "The Betyls of Petra," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 324 (November 2001): 80: "the Greek word *βαιτυλια* itself is related to the Semitic '*beth-el (byt'l),*' which means 'dwelling/ house/temple of god/El,' and seems to refer to open-air sanctuaries"; see also Wenning's discussion on the use of *betyls* in Genesis: "Betyls," 80.

30. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 249; Cross, "The Tabernacle," 60; Gottwald, 214.

31. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 259.

32. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 257. cf. W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), 120 and Cross, "Tabernacle," 50. Albright and Cross do not see the use of camels by Semitic peoples prior to 1100 BCE. The question of Israelite's disposition toward clean and unclean animals may also be raised concerning the ark's transport. Biblical narrative clearly describes the

1966 excavation season near the Arabian copper mines at Timna, and dates to sometime near the mid-twelfth century BCE.[33] This Timna shrine seems to have had pole-holes and vast "quantities of red and yellow cloth." Found inside it was a gilded copper image of a snake.[34]

Accounts from the ancient Near East indicate that *kubbe* may have been used as war palladia.[35] Having been marched into battle, the sight of the tribal god would inspire the devotees to perform heroically, as well as create anxiety and fear for the enemy.[36] The capturing of foreign gods (whether housed in a tent, a box, or marched around on a palanquin) had significant meaning for the conquering power. This act of spoliation was common throughout the ancient Near East.[37] The incarcerated gods were treated as booty, brought into exile, and subsequently displayed as signs that the

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transport of the ark by the Levites (Dt 10:8, "At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord."). Qal=lifted and/or carried (*BBD*, 669-670). This does not prove that there were no beasts of burden involved in the transport of the ark. When the Philistines return the ark in 1 Sam 6:10-12 the ark is set in a wagon pulled by milch cows. We can assume the ark could be transported in diverse ways.

33. Bright, 127; Beno Rothenberg, *Were These King Solomon's Mines? Excavations in the Timna Valley* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 24: the earliest traces of inhabitation at Timna begin in the forth millennium BCE and reveal evidence of Chalcolithic metallurgy.

34. See Rothenberg, *Mines?* 125-179 and Bright, 127 for a detailed description of the tent shrine and the story behind its discovery and excavation; for significance of snake see Nu 21:9: "And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived"; see also 2 Kgs: 18: "…the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it, and he called it Nehushtan." Nehushtan=copper or bronze god, (*Strong's* #5180, *BBD*, 639).

35. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 209; Miller & Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 14-17; Seow, "Ark in P," 187.

36. In 1 Sam 4:4-10 the Philistines become terrified when Hophni and Phinehas carry the ark into the Israelite camp.

37. Two incidents of spoliation by Israel: 2 Sa 5:21 and 2 Ch 25:14-16; see also Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (Montana: Scholars Press, 1974), 116.

defeated were impotent. Spoliation emphasized the superiority of the victor over their enemy.[38] In the mid first millennium BCE Esarhaddon King of Assyria boasted after his march into Memphis:

> I entered Memphis (Me-im-pi), his royal residence, amidst (general) jubilation and rejoicing ... [u] pon the *sadalum* which was plated with gold, I sa[t down] in happiness ... weapons, [...] *KURnanati* of gold, silver, plate[s of] ... Afterwards ... [I en]tered and his personal property (lit: palace), the gods and goddesses of Tirhakah (Tarqu), king of Nubia (Kusu), together with their possessions ... I declared as booty.[39]

Divination was another function of the *kubbe*. After consultation of the *betyls* by a priestly intermediary, a divine command would come forth from the sacred stones, which would determine the fate—and direction—of the tribe.[40] The *kubbe* often marched before a nomadic group and led them to their next encampment—a "divine global positioning system,"[41] similar to the ark marched before the Israelites as they wandered through the desert and then over the Jordon into Palestine (Nm 10:33 and Jo 3:3).

Ugaritic texts found at Ras Shamra on the Levantine coast (composed before 1200 BCE)[42] describe cultic objects that resemble many of the objects described in

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38. Gottwald, 314; Miller & Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 13-14.

39. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 293.

40. Morgenstern, *Ark,* 216.

41. Cross, "Tabernacle," 59-60: "In times of war it accompanied the tribe, generally being set up close by the chieftain's tent. It had the power of guiding the tribe in its wanderings. It possessed a peculiar sacredness or physical holiness second only to the *betyls* which it contained. It was both a palladium and a place of worship. Moreover, priests used the *qubbah (kubbe)* as a place for giving oracles."

42. Richard J. Clifford, "Phoenician Religion," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 279 (August 1990): 55; the ancient kingdom of

Exodus. In the "Baal Epic" the illustration of El's dais reveals a plinth upon which his throne was set:

> A gorgeous dais weighing twice ten thousand (shekels),[43]
> A gorgeous dais cast in silver,
> Coated with a film of gold [44]
> A gorgeous throne resting above
> A gorgeous footstool o'spread with a mat;
> A gorgeous couch having a …,
> He pours it over with gold [cast or gilded]…
> A gorgeous table, which is filled
> With all manner of game from the foundations of the earth;
> Gorgeous bowls shaped like small beasts like those of Amurru[45]
> Stelae shaped like the wild beasts of Ya'man
> Wherein are wild oxen by the myriads.[46]

El is not only identified as the Ugaritic sky or storm god, the Canaanite god Baal, and head of the Canaanite pantheon, but also as the patriarch's *El Shaddai*, the god of the

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Ugarit flourished on the northern Mediterranean littoral directly opposite Cyprus between the fifteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE. Excavations at its main city Ras Shamra have been invaluable for the study of Semitic languages and religion; see also "Ugarit" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford, 1993), 785.

43. Shekel= to weigh (*Strong's* #8255 in *BDB*, 1053). The shekel was a common unit of weight implying value, e.g. for payment. The values varied but were approximate to 252 gm troy for gold and 224.5 gm for silver.

44. The dais was probably gold plated or gilded.

45. Rhytons=zoomorphic drinking vessels, usually raised from silver or gold.

46. Pritchard, *ANET*, 132. e.II AB (editions by Albright et sequ.Ch. Virolleaud, H.L. Ginsberg, J.A. Montgomery, Z.S. Harris, H. Bauer, C.H. Gordon, U. Cassuto, T.H. Gaster); Albright freely admits there are many complications with the reconstruction of lines 31-42: W.F. Albright, "The Furniture of El in Canaanite Mythology," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 91 (October 1943): 40-42.

Sinai covenant, (Ex 3:14; 6:3).[47] Thus the name El is used for god by both the Canaanites and the Israelites.[48]

There is no consensus in modern discourse regarding the nature of ancient Israelite worship practices. Was YHWHism truly aniconic from the beginning, or did Israelite cultic practices include icons or representations, as it was with other cults in the ancient Near East, especially Egypt?[49] In ancient Egypt the cultic figure was kept in the dark inner sanctuary of the temple. During festivals and celebrations the idol was taken out in a barque and paraded by priests.[50] "We cannot be sure that the religion of Moses was aniconic, although it is possible that the Second Commandment reflects his teaching against the imitation of the cultic art of Egypt."[51] This statement by Viladesau raises an interesting query for our consideration: was the issue of iconic representation so problematic for the wandering Israelites (and so embedded in their collective psyche) that it required such apodictic expurgation? If one considers the heresy of the golden calf (Exodus 32) the answer would be yes. During much of its

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47. G.W. Ahlstrom, *Aspects of Syncretism in the Israelite Religion*, transl. Eric J. Sharpe (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963): 12; Coogan and Metzger, *OCB*, 785.

48. The E source is so named for its tendency to use El or Elhoim as a name of YHWH.

49. In *The Image and the Book*, edited by Karel Van der Toorn (Leuven: Peters, 1997): Bob Becking, "Assyrian Evidence for Iconic Polytheism in Ancient Israel?"; Tryggve Mettinger, "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins,"; Christoph Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for YHWH's Cult Images."

50. Hornung, "Egyptian Iconography," 1716.

51. Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford Press, 1999), 52: Viladesau poses questions about the nature of the ancient Israelites' aesthetic in the context of a larger conversation about religious aesthetics: "the essence of idolatry consists not in the medium in which God is represented but in the way in which it is used: as a means of encounter with and memory of the living transcendent reality, or as a projection of human self-worship." Understanding the Israelite attitude toward graven images is key to understanding their struggle with monotheism, (ibid., 52).

pre-exilic history Israel struggled with the worship of foreign gods, many of which were represented by icons. Some scholars have concluded that, in all probability, the cult of YHWH in its earliest stages was iconic.[52] If other tribes and cultures in the ancient Near East performed cultic rituals in front of a statue, image, or representation of their deity, then why not Israel? The strength of the prohibition implies that cultic statues were being used by the cultus: "prohibition presupposes their existence."[53] There would have been no point to prohibit a practice that was not preexisting! It is clear that iconic tendencies were present well before the Israelites had reached consensus on their theological position regarding icons and representation of the deity.[54] It is feasible that some sort of representation of YHWH was contained in, or on top of, the ark during the first period.

Issues have been raised about the function of the ark during the period of the Israelite's desert wandering. Morgenstern described it as a tent-like shrine that may have acted as: a container for some representation of YHWH (1 Sam 4), a device for divination (Ex 33:9), a war palladium (Jo 6:7), and a divine "GPS" (Nm 10:33). Morgenstern's position follows that "it was only after the ark was installed in the First Temple (1 Kgs 8) that it became the 'golden throne of YHWH' containing not two *betyls*, but rather the two tablets of the Decalogue.[55]

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52. Izak Cornelius, "The Religious Iconography of Israel and Judah ca.1200-587 BCE," *Religion Compass* 2/2 (2008): 102; Herbert Niehr, "In Search of YHWH's Cult Statue in the First Temple," in *The Image and the Book*, edited by Karel Van der Toorn (Leuven: Peters, 1997): 73; Mettinger, 185; Uehlinger, 152.

53. Niehr, 73; see also "Graven Image," *OCB*, 261.

54. 2 Kgs 18:4 (Nehushtan); 2 Kgs 21:7 (Asherah).

55. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 230.

During the second period in the life of the Israelite (and Judaean) ark it rested virtually unmoved in the First Temple's holy of holies. This period lasted for almost 400 years until 586 BCE when the ark disappeared in the wake of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.[56] Many of the Israelites were deported east to Babylon. But now it is necessary to go south to Egypt to uncover the original ark.

56. Ibid., 259.

OUT OF AFRICA

Sometime during the reign of Rameses II[57] (according to Exodus 1:12) the Israelites fled Egypt and crossed over the Reed Sea[58] and into the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula, where they wandered for a generation.[59] Some scholars have assigned a thirteenth century BCE date for the exodus, with Rameses II as the pharaoh who caused the Israelites enough grief to inspire their flight.[60] It may be assumed that at least some of the descendents of Joseph had become slaves in Egypt, or were compelled into forced labor, albeit under ambiguous circumstances.[61] Nevertheless, they had escaped "in some marvelous way."[62] We might ask, what circumstances *allowed* the Israelites to escape, and what dissuaded the Egyptians from pursuing them?[63] A review of the historical records from the period in question provides some answers.

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57. Rameses II (1290-1224), son of Sethos I.

58. Albright, "Patriarchs," 57; Bright, 122; Gottwald, 198; see also "Red Sea," *OCB,* 644 for "Sea of Reeds" (*yam suf*) in contrast with "Red Sea."; the proximity of the city of Rameses, the likely origins of the Exodus (Ex 12:37), to Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes charts a more eastward course for the fleeing Israelites. They may have traveled along the copper routes toward Timna, which would have made for safe passage having been largely abandoned by the Egyptians during the late thirteenth century BCE Levantine campaigns under Rameses II.

59. Albright, "Patriarchs," 62; Bright, 123; Gottwald, 192.

60. Gottwald, 191. For the oppression of Israelites in Egypt see Nahum M. Sarna, "Exploring Exodus: The Oppression," *Biblical Archaeologist* 49, no. 2 (June 1986): 68-80.

61. *ABD*, vol. 6, 62.

62. Bright, 120.

63. Ibid., 122. Clearly had Pharaoh wanted to recapture the Israelites he would have pursued them into the desert. Their escape indicates Rameses II was preoccupied with more pressing matters.

During the early thirteenth century BCE Egypt was preoccupied with tense campaigns in Canaan and the Levant.[64] It was an ailing superpower that was only just recovering from its losses incurred during the decadent reign of Akhenaten.[65] Rameses II sought to recoup those losses at the northern frontier in the Levant by marching his columns toward the Hittites; he was severely beaten back at Qadesh.[66] Egypt was on the defense until the Assyrian threat lured away the Hittites. For Rameses II, following the Israelites—a rogue band of discontented laborers or slaves––through the reeds and into the desert was probably not a high priority. As Egypt receded from the Levant it left in its wake a collection of commissioned mercenaries to guard its tattered front. They were possibly remnants of the Mycenaean marauders who had attempted to take the North African coast in the fourteenth century BCE.[67] Now, left behind in Canaan, those mercenary tribes slowly assumed power, and in the ensuing centuries these "Philistines" would become the bane of the Israelites.[68] With so much activity on the Mediterranean littoral, it was no wonder the Israelites fled east toward Timna, instead of north. At Timna Egyptian copper mining activities had

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64. Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Pharaoh Ramesses II and His Times," in *CANE*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 765: during the early thirteenth century BCE battle of Qadesh Rameses II attempted to push the frontier of his empire north, but he met with fierce resistance from the Hittites.

65. Kitchen, "Ramesses II," 763.

66. Bright, 113.

67. Trude Dothan, "The Sea People and the Philistines of Ancient Palestine," in *CANE*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 1274.

68. Plystm=foreigner: Philistine.

extended from ca.1310–1150 BCE, but were interrupted under Rameses II,[69] thus providing the Israelites a doorway to escape east through Sinai.

The reign of Rameses II lasted until the late thirteenth century BCE and Rameses II was succeeded by his son, Merniptah.[70] In spite of the new Pharaoh's valorous tone in the stele inscription that recorded his campaign of 1220 BCE, many of the Canaanite tribes that are mentioned as having been defeated—including Israel[71]—had actually rallied against Egypt, inflicting—not sustaining—crippling blows. The Egyptian empire was continuing to weaken,[72] and Merniptah's claimed victory might very well have been a propagandistic fiction;[73] it was a hollow boast. Egypt's claims over Canaan, Palestine and the Levant diminished, and by the late eleventh century BCE Egypt's primacy as the region's sole aggressor had faded.[74] Israel had escaped Egypt, and with their oppressors vanquished, Israel crossed the Jordon and set out to claim the land that YHWH had promised to their ancestors (Gen 12:1-3) with the ark of their god before them.

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69. Albright, "Patriarchs," 57.

70. Merniptah (regnal year 1224) was the son and successor of Rameses II.

71. "The Merniptah Stele": Pritchard *ANET*, 378: "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not…"; in a note on 378 Pritchard clarifies that the name "Israel" was written with a determinative indicating Israel as "a people" in distinction from "a land."

72. Bright, 115.

73. Bright, 123.

74. Bright, 175.

ART & TECHNOLOGY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

In the fourteenth century BCE "Universalist Hymn to the Sun" there is expressed a sympathetic—even libertarian—attitude towards alien peoples and foreign lands, ideals patented by Egypt's supreme solar deity Aten[75]:

> The countries of Syria and Nubia, the land of Egypt,
> Thou settest every man in his place,
> Thou suppliest their necessities:
> Everyone has his food, and his time of life is reckoned.[76]

Yet Rameses II appears not to have been disposed toward such egalitarian ideals. He conscripted the Israelites to make bricks for his building programs in the cities of Pithom and Rameses during the early thirteenth century BCE.[77] As brick-making slaves in Egypt, life would have been difficult for the Israelites, and they would have had very little status within Egyptian society. According to Sarna, "what we are

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75. Aten=sun disk, Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003) 236-241.

76. Pritchard, *ANET*, 370; see also John L. Foster, "The Hymn to Aten: Akhenaten Worships the Sole God," in *CANE*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 1752. References to Aten become more frequent during the Eighteenth Dynasty and the idea of a single "universal" godhead reached its pitch during the Amarna period under the reign of Akhenaten, 1353-1335 BCE (ibid., 1754); c.f. Psalm 104: 27, "All of them look to You to give them food when it is due," Coogan, *Old Testament*, 460.

77. "Pithom"="House of Atum," identified with modern Tell el-Maskhuta; known to have been a center of the cult of Atum, "the earliest inscriptions here derive from the time of Rameses II and show that this place was also known as Succoth," (Ex 12:37 and 13:20). Rameses is the ancient Hyksos capital Avaris, rebuilt by Rameses II upon the death of his father Sethos I, Sarna, "The Oppression," 74; Rameses came to be known as the "house of Rameses" and in later centuries Tanis casting doubt that later generations would have remembered the name Tanis in connection Rameses pointing to authenticity in the Hebrew narrative, Bright, 121.

dealing with is state slavery, the organized imposition of forced labor upon the male population."[78] Sarna describes life for the Israelite brick-makers under Rameses II:

> Egyptian papyri and paintings yield a clear picture of the nature of the work and the techniques involved. The industry would be located within easy reach of a plentiful supply of water, usually a pool or canal. Some laborers would do nothing but cart the water back and forth all day long. Others would be employed in the collection of stubble. The artisan who actually molded the bricks would receive from the workers baskets of water-soaked clay mixed with stubble gathered from the fields. He would then shape the material either by hand or in a rectangular wooden mold. The brick would be left to dry in the sun for about three days and then turned over, so that the entire process took just about a week. [79]

The monotonous grind of the brick-maker, compounded with an unrelenting sun, made for less than ideal conditions under which the Israelites labored. Such conditions undoubtedly instigated their Exodus.

Sarna's use of "artisan" to describe the brick-makers should be questioned as artisans and slaves were separate in Egyptian society. Slaves were poorly remunerated and were by no means free.[80] The enslavement of an alien class for state-sponsored programs may be contrasted with the practice of hiring Egyptian nationals to work on projects for the Pharaoh's government.[81] Artisans were among the hired classes of workers, which included tomb painters, sculptors, wood carvers, and

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78. Sarna states that there is no evidence that women were enslaved or that family units were compromised as a result of this institutionalized slavery, Sarna, 74. This does not seem very likely, and it should be assumed that any status as slave or forced laborer imposed on the men would have been resulted in the women being treated similarly.

79. Ibid., 76.

80. Ibid., 75.

81. W. Gunther Plaut, gen. ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, rev. ed. (New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2006), 360.

metalworkers–-the list is hardly exhaustive. Most specialized laborers were generally free to move about. This included doctors and cooks, who were classed similarly to artisans.[82] In ancient Egyptian society artisans occupied an important position in the organization of society.[83] Success for the Egyptian artisan was based on the mastering of accepted artistic conventions and the skillful and faithful application of those conventions, individual artistic expression was not a characteristic of Egyptian art.[84] Evidence from the Old Kingdom suggests that architects and sculptors were both held in high regard.[85]

It is questionable whether there existed during the New Kingdom (1550-1050 BCE) a class of artisans who worked within a "free market" producing wares of their own for trade. Perhaps all artisans were dependent on governmental institutions and programs (e.g. temple and tomb building) for the steady stream of subsistence goods, for which their work was remunerated in-kind.[86]

> The general pattern gleaned from textual evidence is that there were a number of people who used their specialized skills within the realm of the palace/temple bureaucracy; they were dependants of the administration, which provided them with food, clothing, dwellings,

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82. Throughout the ancient Near East, during the late second to early first millennium, there was no differentiation between artists and artisans: Donald Matthews, "Artists and Artisans in Ancient Western Asia," in *CANE*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 466.

83. Rosemarie Drenkhahn, "Artisans and Artists in Pharaonic Egypt," in *CANE*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 331; the glyph for artisan *hmwtj* was a drill and, like the rest of the ancient Near East, there was no distinction between artist and artisan (ibid).

84. Ibid., 339.

85. Ibid., fig. 3, 337; 339; see also R.O. Faulkner, "The Stela of the Master-Sculptor Shen," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 38 (December 1952): 3-4.

86. Drenkhahn, 335; J. J. Janssen, "Prolegomena to the Study of Egypt's Economic History During the New Kingdom," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 3, (1975): 160.

> raw materials, and professional tools. The juridical status enjoyed by these artisans, as a rule, was that of free status, and they occupied lifetime posts in the administration.[87]

One might imagine artisan dynasties in which families and entire urban districts were associated with a particular craft, and their reputation for high quality, use of exceptional materials, and exquisite artisanship set them apart.

Excavations at Deir el-Medina reveal such a community. It was a highly structured and self-contained community of artisans who worked on the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, including many tomb painters and metalworkers.[88] Native Egyptian artisans worked beside artisans from Asia and Nubia**.**[89] There is evidence that some of the artisans who worked in Dier el Medina produced utilitarian objects (beds, sandals, baskets, mats) as well as cultic objects (Canopic jars,[90] statues). In addition they performed state-sponsored tasks, and carried out private commissions, which are recorded on *ostraca*.[91]

Egyptian artisans were stationed in workshops according to their respective trade (e.g. stone carving, glass making, goldsmithing) and each artisan within the workshop specialized in a specific labor task in the chain of production. This labor system was dependent on instruction from masters who would train apprentices, and individual artisans could acquire a reputation of excellence for their skills and

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87. Carlo Zaccagnini, "Patterns of Mobility Among Ancient Near Eastern Craftsmen," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (October 1983): 245.

88. Jenssen, 160.

89. Ibid.

90. Canopic jars=urns that held embalmed organs that were buried with the dead.

91. Drenkhahn, 335; *Ostraca*=fragments of clay upon which texts were written.

methodology at a particular task; they would be assigned a better position in the workshop, particularly that of overseer, who supervised production and whose position it was to maintain the quality expected from the workshop.[92]

Oftentimes, the Egyptians illustrated scenes of artisans producing the necessary goods that would accompany the dead on their journey into the afterlife. Tomb paintings from the Old Kingdom onwards depict artisans organized by the type of raw material with which they worked, not by the genre to which the objects they produced belonged.[93] These tomb paintings illustrate the detailed methods and various tools used by goldsmiths, stone carvers, woodworkers and even brick-makers; they are invaluable study aids for the contemporary historian interested in learning ancient production technologies, as well as the social position of the artisan in Egyptian society.[94]

What would mid-first century P have understood about the Egyptian context of art as it pertained to the late second millennium?[95] The historical veracity of Exodus notwithstanding, the inclusion of such gifted artisans as Bezalel and Oholiab set in the context to a recent departure from Egypt offers a rich conjectural scenario based on second millennium "palace organization."[96] While the majority of Israelites who left Egypt during the Exodus may have been slaves under Rameses II, the case may be made that there were representations from other social classes among them:

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92. Drenkhahn, 337.
93. Ibid., 338.
94. Ibid.
95. From ca. 5000 to 500 BCE Egyptian art retained basic patterns. While it was highly innovative, essential styles reasserted themselves. Jansen, *History of Art*, 54.
96. Zaccagnini, 261.

Israel's descendents who also longed for self-determination. Perhaps some Israelite artisans also felt the strong call to align themselves with their own people and egress from Egypt. Exodus is a story that describes a people who viewed themselves as compromised due to their social status and their theological disposition, which placed them not only on the fringes of their host society, but in direct conflict with it. There was a terse standoff (Ex 5-12) after which Pharaoh (i.e. Rameses II) resigns and sets free Moses' people. While the historicity of the story may be questioned, it illustrates the restive relationship between Israel and Egypt during the late second millennium BCE. During their Exodus—whether they crossed through the reeds casually or in haste—the Israelites carried with them artisan traditions that were characteristically Egyptian.

THE ARK: MATRIX & ICONOGRAPHY

[10]They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. [11]Overlay it with pure gold—overlay it inside and out—and make upon it a gold molding round about it. [12]Cast four gold rings for it, to be attached to its four feet, two rings on one of its side walls and two on the other. [13]Make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold; [14] then insert the poles into the rings on the side walls of the ark, for carrying the ark. [15] The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it. [16]And deposit in the Ark the Pact, which I will give you. [17]You shall make a cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. [18]Make two cherubim of gold—make them of hammered work—at the two ends of the cover. [19]Make one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end; of one piece with the cover you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. [20]The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover. [21]Place the cover on top of the Ark after depositing inside the Ark the Pact that I will give you. [22]There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you—from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the pact—all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people. (Exodus 25, JSB)

Skills and longing were not the only things that accompanied the Israelites as they fled Egypt. They had gold, taken from their Egyptian neighbors (Ex 12:35), and the bones of their patriarch Joseph, who was embalmed in the manner of the Egyptians and interred in a wooden sarcophagus (Gn 50:26). It was not long after their escape that the divine directive to build the ark (and other cultic objects) was given to Moses by YHWH. The materials utilized by the Israelites to construct their ark would have come from what was available to them in Sinai Peninsula.[97] In

97. See “Acacia” and “Gold” in A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, 4th ed. (London: Arnold, 1962), 174, 257-267; Paul T. Nicholson and Ian

addition to the physical properties of those materials, the Israelites would have been exposed to the Egyptian paradigm that all materials were suffused with divine agency and imbued with rich symbolic associations.[98]

ACACIA WOOD

Fine wood varieties, such as cedar, were rare in Egypt, but evidence from the Old Kingdom suggests that trade with Lebanon included the exchange of cedar timber, the use of which was relegated to the upper classes and Pharaohs.[99] Local woods were employed for construction of boats, as well as other functional and decorative objects. Such objects as chairs, tables and shrines were made from acacia,[100] willow, thorn, persea, sycamore, date palm,[101] and other native species.[102] Other evidence shows that oak was used in the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Tutankhamen, but the wood resources commonly used for funerary purposes were

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Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 161-166, 335.

98. Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic in Ancient Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 82.

99. Ammad Ben-Tor, "New Light on the Relations between Egypt and Southern Palestine During the Early Bronze Age," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 281, Egypt and Canaan in the Bronze Age (February 1991): 4; "cedar" may have been applied to other types of woods that may not have been cedar, although the use of cedar for coffins and other burial appurtenances can be dated beginning in the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2500 BCE) hence, establishment of regular contacts between Egypt and Western Asia should be dated no earlier than the Early Bronze Age (ca. forth millennium BCE), Lucas, 432.

100. Nicholson, 335.

101. Persea is mentioned in texts from the Eighteenth Dynasty onward. It was used for making beds, images, tables and other objects. It was said to be good for the stomach, Lucas, 445; "Hathor was also identified with the tree-goddess, as in the famous Hathor cults at Memphis, where she was called "The Mistress of the Southern Sycamore." In other nomes she was regarded as the Mistress of the Date Palms." Sycamore=refuge; date palm=sweet, Marie-Louise Buhl, "The Goddess of the Egyptian Tree Cult," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6, no. 2 (April 1947): 86.

102. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 89-90.

sycamore fig and acacia.[103] Acacia was used for the construction of boats as it was hard, yet elastic and buoyant,[104] and it was known to be resistant to rot and fungus. Acacia also supplied resin, which was used for various applications from medicinal to adhesive (e.g. to adhere mummy wrappings). Modern chemical analysis shows that from the twelfth century BCE on *gum arabic*, derived from the acacia,[105] was used in Egyptian paints.[106] Acacia also thrived in Middle Egypt and Nubia, as well as in the Sinai Peninsula, and with little available water it flourished to produce its characteristic gnarled limbs and twisted seedpods.[107]

Excavations in ancient Egypt have yielded opulent painted and inlaid funerary objects made from acacia, indicating that in spite of its pervasive availability it was highly appreciated and was even considered to be a stately material regal enough for the tombs of pharaohs and "members of the elite."[108] Coffins and sarcophagi made from acacia wood[109] were joined by mortise and tenon.[110] Other methods included planed angles that were fitted together then glued with bandages,[111] or connected with

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103. Nicholson, 340.

104. Ann C. Gunter, "Materials, Technology and Techniques," in *CANE*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 1549.

105. To produce *gum arabic* an acacia tree was tapped by incising its bark. The resulting exudates were harvested after they dried. It was then mixed with boiling water to produce a sticky paste, Nicholson and Shaw, 476-477.

106. Bill Bauman, "The Botanical Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Embalming and Burial," *Economic Botany* 14, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1960): 98.

107. Ibid., 98.

108. Gunter, 1550.

109. Ibid., 1549.

110. Mortise joint=notched end piece of wood into which is fitted a projection on the end of another piece of wood thereby joining them.

111. Glues were made by extracting gelatin from animal bones. Cartilage and tendons were boiled and reduced into a concentration through evaporation, and by pouring into molds. When cooled this formed a solid mass. This glue paste could be mixed with a whitening agent to form gesso, which was used as a ground for painting

wooden pegs. These were common joinery methods utilized in the construction of coffins, shrines and boxes. Gaps in the wood were filled with a primitive "wood putty," most likely a compound of earth and *gum arabic*.[112] The Israelites would have had access to these materials, technologies and techniques.[113]

Both male and female deities were associated with the acacia tree, in particular the winged god Horus.[114] Numerous texts reference Horus in relation to this sacred tree.[115] In Pyramid Text 436a-b Horus is described as coming from the acacia.[116] In another funerary text Unis, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty,[117] was compared with Horus:

> Unis's head has the horns of Horus, lord of the Nile valley. Unis will lead the god, Unis will control the Ennead, Unis will cultivate lapis lazuli, and Unis will plant Nile valley acacia, for Unis has tied together the peppergrass cords, Unis has united the skies, and Unis has taken control of the southern and northern lands—the god of those in (his) presence, for Unis has built the god's town soundly. Unis is the third in his appearance with Horus and the Sun.[118]

Clearly, the acacia was a highly regarded wood resource in ancient Egypt. It is unlikely that the Israelites would have been in sympathy with the associations

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and gilding over all sorts of materials, including wood. The gesso could have been worked into shapes before gilding. See below for techniques on working gold. Glue is present in many of the objects in the tomb of Tutankhamen, where it was employed exactly in the manner of the modern joiner to fasten wood together and to fix ebony and ivory veneer and inlay in place, Lucas, 4.

112. Bill Bauman, "The Botanical Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Embalming and Burial," Economic Botany, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan-Mar, 1960): 87.

113. Lucas, 4.

114. Buhl, 86; Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic,* 91.

115. James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2005), 54, 61.

116. Buhl., 86.

117. Allen, p.15; Fifth Dynasty ca. 2353-2323 BCE.

118. Ibid., 61, also 54: "Unis is Horus, who came from the acacia…"

between the acacia and the Egyptian pantheon, yet they would have been aware of the general connection between the material and its alleged divine agency. However, by the mid first millennium other woods would have been considered more luxurious than acacia.[119] Why not valorize the ark by describing its construction using a more opulent material, for instance cedar? After all, cedar was used in the construction of Solomon's palace and the First Temple. Acacia wood must have been especially known to P and favored for a reason. While it does not prove an early dating for the author's description of the ark, it may indicate that P drew inspiration from an object whose existence has already been documented, or whose formal characteristics were understood. "Acacia wood is a product of the desert, and stands in contrast to the olive and cedar wood which characterized the Temple of Solomon."[120] Perhaps P actually saw the ark and was familiar with its material matrices.

SILVER, GOLD and GODS

As the Hebrew Bible recounts the story, the Israelites left Egypt with gold and silver given by (or perhaps plundered from) their Egyptian neighbors (Ex 11:22).[121] The Egyptians had knowledge of gold-mining techniques prior to the third millennium BCE. They understood how to extract gold from ore, and how to refine it

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119. Potts does not include acacia among the timber resources in Mesopotamia, see "Timber," D.T. Potts, *Mesopotamian Civilization: The Material Foundations* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 106-115; this point should not be overemphasized considering the variety and geographic extent of acacia species throughout the world.

120. Cross, "The Tabernacle," 60.

121. Gold=tawny (*Strong's* #2091, *BDB*, 262); Silver (*Strong's* #3701, *BDB*, 494) root *keceph*=white, or to be eclipsed, as the sun or moon; to darken, as the eye; to be lessened; to become pale. This may indicate an understanding of silver's tarnishing nature, which may not have appealed to the Egyptians who venerated gold for its non-tarnishing quality, Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 133.

for increased purity.[122] The Egyptians exploited the resources to their south in Nubia. During the Eighteenth Dynasty some gold was imported from Asia (mostly in the form of tribute and taxes), however throughout most of Egypt's history their gold came from their own mines between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea.[123] Assay results of precious metals from ancient Egyptian mines place the range of gold purity between 17k and 23k (71 to 96 percent purity).[124] Silver, while not naturally occurring in Egypt, often appeared in Egyptian decorative arts as the principle impurity in gold, the combination of which is called electrum.[125] But most silver was likely imported from Asia through trade, or from Egypt's own mines, which produced silver that contained high percentages of gold.[126]

Gold is malleable. It can be hammered, cast, rolled, engraved—in short, worked by various techniques, all of which were known and used by the Egyptians prior to the second millennium BCE. Other techniques included casting, cloisonné, embossing, engraving, faience (though not a metal working technique), granulation, inlay, repoussé, soldering, and stone cutting (lapidary).[127] Tomb paintings in Saqqara

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122. Pure gold (24k) was not common until the Persian period in Egypt (525-404 BCE), which brought with it better technology for refining the ore, Hermann Schmitt, *The Goldsmith's Art* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 1996), 10.

123. Lucas, 225; "Red Sea" distinct from "Reed Sea" of Exodus.

124. Assay=testing of metal to determine its content; from the Eighteenth Dynasty down, many cases show a gold debasement by copper with a ratio as high as 3:1, which would produce a remarkably low gold karat weight, Lucas, 229, 245; Karat (American and Canadian) is not to be confused with carat, which is the weight of stones.

125. Lucas, 229.

126. Against Petrie, who believed pre-dynastic Egyptian silver was imported from Syria, Lucas believed that Egyptian Silver was likely aurian gold, which had higher concentrations of silver, Lucas, 280 also Nicholson and Shaw, 170.

127. See Glossary section for definitions of techniques; Annie Caubet, "Art and Architecture in Canaan and Ancient Israel," in *CANE*, vol. 4, 2nd ed., edited by

illustrate Egyptian artisans utilizing techniques familiar to the modern metalsmith, for instance, melting gold into ingots.[128] Gold was often pounded into thin sheets or foils for covering such objects as household furniture, coffins, statuary and shrines.[129] Thicknesses for sheet gold ranged from .17 to .54 mm. and were hammered over an object to conform to its shape then fastened with gold nails or rivets. Once an object was overlaid its surface could be chased or engraved.[130]

Foil (leaf) was created by pounding small ingots of gold between two sheets of copper with an egg-shaped stone. As little as one gram of gold could be pounded into sheets of leaf that could cover an area roughly one square meter.[131] These astonishingly thin layers of foil varied in thicknesses from .01 to .09 mm and could adhere to practically any surface with the aid of an adhesive vehicle, and usually the object was coated with a thin layer of gesso prior to gilding.[132] This method of gilding was especially effective on wood, and in the ancient Near East it was common to gild bronze, silver or wooden statuary so it appeared more valuable—and more awesome.[133]

Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 2683; Lois Sher Dubin, *The History of Beads* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 344; Lucas, 231; Schmitt, 10-13.

128. See in particular the south wall in the tomb of Ti, Saqqara dating from the Fifth Dynasty Drenkhahn, 332 fig. 1; also Nicholson and Shaw, 163 fig. 6-4.

129. Nicholson and Shaw, 165.

130. Refer to Glossary section for definitions of techniques; Lucas, 231-32.

131. Schmitt, 12.

132. Lucas, 231-32.

133. See "Wings" section below for description of gilded Horus statue; see also a Late Bronze Age seated deity from Ugarit*,* Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M Evans, eds., *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 247 pl. 151.

The application of gold over an object, whether sheeting or leaf, not only indicated that the object was valuable, but that it was important, sacred, and imbued with symbolic power.[134] The luster of gold was considered mystical: its warm luminosity when lit by candles was a preternatural presence; its blindingly bright surface when lit by the sun inspired awe. Ancient Near Eastern cultures considered "radiance" a positive, powerful property of objects.[135] This quality was attributed to gods, and it was known as *melammu*.[136] Cultic objects were often described as possessing an aura of *melammu*: power, awe, dread, or terror.[137] In 1 Samuel 4, when The Israelites bring the ark of YHWH into battle, fear ripples through the Philistine encampment.[138] The gold covered ark might have been shining radiantly in the sunlight, dazzling their enemy and projecting the metaphysical aura of *melammu*.

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134. Deborah Schorsch, "Precious Metal Polychromy in Egypt in the Time of Tutankhamun," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 87 (2001): 61; Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 84.

135. Irene J. Winter, "Radiance as an Aesthetic Value in the Art of Mesopotamia (with Some Indian Parallels)," in *Art: The Integral Vision*, edited by B.N. Saraswati, S.C. Malik, and Madhu Khanna (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1994), 123.

136. *melammu* is an Akkadian term, Winter, 127; "Akkadian served as the *lingua franca* of Near-Eastern diplomacy," Cross, "The Tabernacle," 49.

137. Winter, 127.

138. Ibid., 127: "In the Neo-Babylonian period, there are several references to temples being invested with *melammu*, along with a single instance in which Nebuchadrezzar's [sic] palace walls were said to have been enveloped with the vital, fierce dread aura of kingship. It would not be surprising to find similar Neo-Assyrian references to palaces; it would however, be surprising to find such referenced in the earlier periods. This could reflect an important historical shift toward investing the institution of royalty and the associated seat of the king with qualities hitherto more directly reserved for deities; but to sustain such a reconstruction, one would have to comb the texts systematically and chart chronologically the sorts of works in which *melammu* was said to be invested."

In ancient Egypt, particularly in the later kingdoms, gold was linked with immortality. Silver darkens as it oxidizes, copper turns green, iron rusts.[139] In contrast gold remains defiantly unchanged by time; it does not tarnish, and is persistently radiant like the sun—like the skin of Aten.[140] The era of Akhenaten brought with it a "lofty solar monotheism whose attribute was symbolized with gold."[141] One need only think of the tomb of King Tutankhamen to understand the metaphysical value gold held for the Egyptians.[142] Silver was associated with the moon and ritual purity; in contrast, gold was correlated with the sun.[143] Used together, gold and silver were analogous to the flesh and bones of the gods, a concept poetically encapsulated in a New Kingdom tomb inscription "The Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction"[144]:

> It happened that…Re, the god who came into being by himself, when he was king of men and gods all together. Then mankind plotted something in the very presence of Re. Now then, his majesty—life, prosperity, health!–-was old. His bones were of silver, his flesh of gold, and his hair of genuine lapis lazuli.[145]

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139. Erhard Brepohl, *The Theory and Practice of Goldsmithing*, ed. Tim McCreight, transl. Charles Lewton-Brain (Maine: Brynmorgen Press, 2001), 15.

140. Aten=radiant sun disk, Wilkinson, *Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 236-241; Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 83.

141. Cross, "The Tabernacle," 49.

142. See plates throughout: Nicholas Reeves and John Taylor, *Howard Carter: Before Tutankhamen* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993); Reeves and Wilkinson, *The Complete Valley of the Kings*; David P. Silverman, *Masterpieces of Tutankhamun*, (New York: Abbeville, 1978).

143. Schorsch, 57.

144. Pritchard, *ANET*, 11; inscriptions were found on the tomb walls of Seti I, Rameses II, and III at Thebes, and date from the fourteenth to twelfth centuries BCE.

145. Lapis lazuli is a stone consisting of aluminum and sodium silicates together with sodium sulphide. Traces of iron pyrite may have appeared to the Egyptians as gold, hence the sacred quality of the stone. It is probably the *safiros* of Theophratus and the *sapphirus* of Pliny. The primary source of lapis for Egypt would have been the Badakshan mines in present day Afghanistan. From the Old Kingdom down lapis was obtained most likely through trade with Asia, Lucas, 399.

It is possible that when the ancient Israelites left Egypt they were equipped with the techniques necessary to build the ark as described by P. They also had the material resources available to them. Sections of the ark may have been covered with worked gold, but it is unlikely that the entire surface was heavily plated, as that would have made the ark impossibly heavy for the itinerant Israelites. More likely, the ark was covered with gold leaf. Considering the size of the acacia ark as it is described in Exodus, a very small amount of gold would have been needed to imbue the ark with *melammu*, and its already considerable weight would not have been compromised. The gold the Israelites took with them was ample enough to satisfy their aesthetic desires.

GOLD RINGS

There is a slight problem to take into account: cast rings of gold (Ex 25:12), while strong, could not sustain the weight of an ark several hundred pounds. Gold, while regal, is soft, and the constant abrasion of the staves inside the rings while being carried around would easily have worn out the rings in a short period of time causing the need for continual replacement. If the Exodus description were taken literally, then it would have been necessary to alloy the gold with another metal to increase its durability. With a harder metal, such as silver (electrum) or copper (lower karat gold),[146] the rings might have been able to sustain the weight of the ark.

146. Albright, "Patriarchs," 58: the Israelites would not have been able to forge iron at this point; also Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a Kenite, an ancient clan of metalsmiths and descendents from tubal-Cain (Gn 4:22).

WINGS

The essential design language of Egyptian art endured for several millennia.[147] Generally throughout the ancient Near East, austere monuments, stiff and aloof, are prominent in the sculptural arts prior to the introduction of more naturalistic forms in the late first millennium BCE. The advent of Hellenistic themes changed the course of Western art by supplanting rigid monumentalism with forms that attempted to emulate reality and allow emotions to inhabit them.[148] Late second millennium formalistic art conventions in Egypt (and the rest of the ancient Near East) belie the wilting angels swathed in flowing robes many modern artists set atop the Israelite ark. If such representations of the ark's cherubim[149] were verisimilar to the actual cherubim created by Bezalel and Oholiab, those two artisans would have launched a major change in Western art centuries earlier than the Greeks. Modern depictions of the cherubim are inaccurate due to a decontextualization of the description in Exodus; the renderings are dislocated from the relevant time period—late second millennium BCE. Granted, many artists preceding the twentieth century did not have access to the wealth of ancient Near Eastern sources available at present. Today, artists possess an expanding lexicon of resources from ages past that better inform the modern understanding of particular time periods and particular cultures. Contemporary artists should take cues from late second-millennium archaeology and art history and resist

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147. Janson, *History of Art*, 54.

148. The polychrome contours of the bust of Ankhhaf (Egyptian, Fourth Dynasty; Boston Museum accession number: 27.442) exhibits a remarkable suppleness, and the bones beneath the "skin" appear remarkably realistic. The brief stylistic transformations during the Amarna period in Egypt pushed Egypt's religion and design language in wholly new directions. Forms became exaggerated, almost caricatures. The stylistic revolution of the Amarna was transient and receded after the death of Akhenaten; see Janson, *History of Art*. 66-68.

149. Cherubim=winged guardian creatures.

the tendency to render the cherubim in the Greek styles (whether Classic or Hellenistic). Even Cypro-Classical[150] art forms, while potentially consonant with P, would be too recent for an accurate rendition of a late second-millennium ark.

Most cultures of the ancient Near East had as an iconographic motif some sort of guardian creature. Often it was theriomorphic and winged.[151] In Egypt, as we will see, it was a winged solar disk, but in the northern regions, the Levant and Mesopotamia, winged creatures took on various forms. Most famous are the ninth century BCE reliefs that adorn the palace walls of Ashurbanipal II depicting winged geniis.[152] These guardian creatures flanked an alternating central object: the deified king and the stylized tree of life. Winged guardian creatures—or cherubim—often illustrated the unique relationship between deity and king,[153] and they sometimes had an apotropaic function.[154] Winged guardians were used as architectural elements in walls and gates, and monumental sculptures denoting the awesome power of an empire.[155] The winged human-headed bull in the ancient Near East seems to have appeared during the first half of the second millennium BCE and proliferated throughout Assyria for about one thousand years. The motif reached its peak during

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150. ca. 480-310 BCE: Karageorghis, *Ancient Art from Cyprus*, 202-203.

151. Theriomorphic (also zoomorphic)=having an animal form; anthropomorphic=having human form.

152. Pierre Amiet, *Forms and Styles: Antiquity* (Koln: Taschen, 1994), 109.

153. G.W. Ahlstrom, *Aspects of Syncretism in the Israelite Religion*, transl. by Eric J. Sharpe (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963): 45.

154. Apotropaic=guard against evil or bad luck; "At the turn of the first millennium BCE… religious iconography was progressively taken over by written traditions, so it tended to specialize in the representation of apotropaic and prophylactic themes," V. Danrey, "Winged Human-Headed Bulls of Nineveh: Genesis of an Iconographic Motif," *Iraq* 66, Nineveh: Papers of the 49th Rencontre Assriologique Internationale, Part One (2004): 135.

155. Caubet, 2677.

the reign of Ashurbanipal and, "no other figure came to substitute the winged human-headed bull at the gates of the last Neo-Assyrian buildings."[156] Shortly thereafter the winged bull guardian disappears as monumental form.[157]

Outstretched wings, in Egyptian iconography, served as symbols of protection.[158] Winged solar disk motifs were carried out of Egypt through Phoenicia and dispersed throughout the rest of the ancient world sometime near the close of the second millennium.[159] The motifs found their way into all forms of decorative and functional arts, for instance, on lapis lazuli cylinder seals found among a trove of objects of Cypriot or Syro-Levantine origin.[160] Uncovered during twentieth-century excavations at Thebes, the Late Bronze Age walled city of Greece, these seals with dates ranging from the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BCE show the winged solar disk hovering over the heads of seated figures.[161] Recent analyses suggest these seated figures represent deities or kings, and the presence of the winged disk over their head may symbolize that an oath has been sealed.[162] The function of the solar disks in Mesopotamia and the far-flung regions of the Mediterranean beyond Egypt

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156. Danrey, 139.

157. Ibid., 139: "Its disappearance has sometimes been attributed to the lack of large stone blocks in Assurbanipal's time. However, it is difficult to see the real reasons for this break, which is probably linked to the evolution of religious symbolism during the period of profound change characterizing the end of a great empire."

158. Keel, *Symbolism*, 28.

159. Ibid., 192.

160. Cornelius, 107: the solar disk originated in Egypt but was linked with Phoenicia.

161. Mycenaean Thebes in distinction from Thebes of Upper Egypt. Legend states that King Hiram founded Mycenaean Thebes, which would account for the abundant Phoenician treasures found there, Aruz, et al, *Beyond Babylon*, 284-285.

162. Stephanie Dalley, "The God Salmu and the Winged Disk," *Iraq* 48 (1986): 97-98.

appear legalistic. In contrast hieroglyphs adorning the walls of ancient Egyptian tombs provide firm evidence attesting to the metaphysical protective power of the solar disk and to its association with the deity Horus:

> "O Heru-Behutet, O son of Ra, thou exalted one, who didst proceed from me, overthrow thou the enemies who are before thee straightway." And Heru-Behutet flew up into the horizon in the form of the great Winged Disk, for which reason he is called "Great god, lord of heaven," unto this day.[163]

An excerpt from the "Hymn of Praise to Horus" illustrates the Holy Beetle Khepera, shepherding the sun across the sky, spreads his wings solicitously:

> "Horus is protected as the Holy Beetle, the mighty wings of which are at the head of the sky; and he who is under the knife is protected likewise."[164]

Lamenting the loss of her missing consort-brother, who had been chopped up by his rival, the goddess Isis flew around the world to collect the pieces of Osiris while "making light from her feathers, [and] air to come into being by means of her two wings."[165] Winged motifs where the feathers are arching downward can be seen on Egyptian funerary and cultic objects, and they represent the hieroglyph for "sky,"

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163. " The Legend of Horus of Behutet and the Winged Disk," E.A Wallis Budge, *The Legends of the Gods of the Egyptian Texts* (Project Gutenberg: 2005, EBook #9411), 58.

164. Budge, 88; the scarab, or dung beetle known as Khepera (Khepri), was a form of the sun-god symbolizing sunrise, Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, 230.

165. "The Legend of Isis and Osiris," Budge, 63. According to this New Kingdom legend, Osiris is cut up into 13 pieces, 12 of which were found by Isis, except for Osiris' missing penis, which was replaced with a golden one. From the union of Isis and Osiris came Horus.

which in turn connotes the protective qualities associated with the wing: the shape of the glyph points to its meaning.[166]

The symbolic significance of the wing motif in the ancient Near East, particularly in Egypt, contributes to any understanding of the meaning of the cherubim astride the ark of the Israelites. The cherubim take on profound meaning beyond that of mere decoration. It is apparent that the cherubim, particularly their wings, were meant to protect whatever was actually in the ark. In light of historical evidence, and the relationship of the Israelites to Egypt, there is no reason to believe the wing motif would not have existed in the visual lexicon of the ancient Israelites. The remaining question is, how would the cherubim have been fabricated?

Exodus 25:18 describe the cherubim as having been "hammered" from pure gold. This could be taken to mean that the original cherubim were cast and then worked with decorative techniques that required hammering, such as chasing. Casting techniques acquired during their days in Egypt would not have been forgotten. Open mold casting, which developed out of sand pit casting, was a technique regularly utilized by the ancient Egyptians.[167] If the wandering Israelites could have cast a golden calf in the desert, then undoubtedly casting two gold cherubim would have been possible. Hammering details into the surface by chasing would provide the cherubim with the necessary features, such as feathers. But cast gold decorative elements would have been prohibitively heavy. The Late New Kingdom or Third Intermediate Period silver statue of Horus that is overlaid with thick sheets of gold, at

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166. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 17-18.

167. James D. Muhly, "Mining and Metalwork in Ancient Western Asia," in *CANE*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., edited by Jack M. Sasson, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson: 2006), 1505.

42 cm high weighs 16.5 kg.[168] If approximated to the size of two cherubim, without considering the additional weight of the solid gold wings or accounting for the solid gold kapporet to which the cherubim were attached, 73 pounds of additional weight would have contributed to the already heavy ark. It is difficult to believe that an itinerant group of former slaves would burden themselves in such a way. Therefore, two cast cherubim, later detailed by hammer work, could be discounted without difficulty because they would have been weighty additions on an already heavy ark. There were other metalworking techniques available to the ancient Israelites.

During their time in Egypt Israelite artisans were exposed to Egyptian metalsmithing techniques. More feasible methods for fabricating the cherubim would have been learned and employed. Hammering statues out of gold, as described in Exodus, makes little sense unless the hammering technique had been some form of *raising*, a metal working technique that requires a hammer and a hard surface upon which to work the metal (in the ancient world it would have been a bronze or stone fulcrum). *Raising* would create a hollow, three-dimensional form that could later be chased and etched to bring out surface detail. Yet it is questionable why the wandering Israelite artisans would have used this technique, which would have been an awkward method to create the cherubim forms. Hollow work might have collapsed easily, and the weight of the gold would still have been a prohibitive factor, therefore raising a full form would have been unlikely in this instance.

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168. Schorsch, 62; Reeves and Taylor, 172 against Schorsch date the silver Horus from the Third Intermediate Period to the Late Period, a date range of 700 years. Taking into account the consistency of Egyptian styles and techniques an overlap with P would have been inevitable, and such objects would have been available to imitate from the tenth millennium BCE forward.

The most logical and likely technique consonant with gold work in ancient Egypt would have been *repoussé*.[169] The Hebrew *miqshah*, while meaning "hammered," is derived from the root meaning "turner's work and "hard or stiff".[170] *Repoussé*, in a broad sense, is the rounding out (or "making dimensional") of a flat, stiff plate of metal creating a form in relief. The artisan used blunt tools and hammered (dapped) lightly to indent the surface of the metal, which created a billowed elevation on the verso. After the form was fully pushed out from the surface, chasing and engraving produced details, such as facial features or individual feathers of wings. Thin and light, plaques of gold *repoussé* could have been nailed or riveted to the surface of the ark. The plaques, combined with gold leaf, would have created a contiguous golden surface all around the ark, and its portability would not have been compromised by added weight. The cherubim would have been dimensional and hammered, and their wings, stretching around the sides of the ark, would have faced one another. Shrines from Tutankhamen's tomb were made in such a way.[171] An Egyptian provenance for the design of Israelite ark is possible. It stands that the early Israelites were intimately familiar with Egyptian New Kingdom artisan techniques and iconographical motifs, which they were able to employ for their own aesthetic ends.

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169. The basic techniques of *repoussé* have changed little over time, Nancy Megan Corwin, *Chasing and Repoussé: Methods Ancient and Modern* (Maine: Brynmorgen Press, 2009), ix.

170. *Strong's* #4749, *BDB*, 904.

171. See "Golden Shrine" in Silverman, 54; Reeves and Wilkinson, *Valley of the Kings*, 48-49, 85.

THE PHOENICIAN FACTOR

It is the position of this paper that there was a significant amount of history in the ark tradition that reached P from the desert, and it filtered through the First Temple at Jerusalem.[172] P might have fabricated Exodus 25-31 from a remote time period and geographic location (namely mid-first millennium Babylon) yet descriptions of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances were based on existing data. Some ark traditions had developed during the post-Exodus events in Sinai, and other traditions took shape during the settling into Palestine. Those stories were compacted into the Deuteronomistic History.[173] It is in DtrH that we become acquainted with the various "personalities" of the ark introduced above—palladium, repository, GPS. It is also in DtrH that we are introduced to Solomon's vast building program in the tenth century BCE, and the installation of the ark in the First Temple (1 Kgs 8: 1-9). The ark that was installed in the Temple, as has been shown, could have resembled the ark that P described in Exodus 25, as it was characteristically Egyptian. While Solomon's design program for the Temple was Phoenician, worked into the architecture were two monumental cherubim for the sanctuary. It should not be taken to mean that Solomon's sculptural cherubim existed at the expense of the cherubim that already existed—in some form—on the ark; it merely underscores the continuity with the general architectural design program. With repetitive motifs from the decorative arts

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172. Coogan, *Old Testament*, 27.

173. Ibid., 198, Coogan cites P material in DtrH, specifically expansions in Joshua.

reflected in the monumental and architectural aspects, "some influence of the Temple upon the P account is undeniable."[174]

One thing is clear from the account of Solomon's architectural commission (1 Kings 5-7): Solomon was aware that he lacked the material and aesthetic resources to functionally carry out his building program. Solomon's solution was to call on Hiram of Tyre for provisions. So the Phoenician King sent building materials and services for the construction of the Jerusalem Temple. The parity treaty between the two kingdoms allowed for such freedom of trade.[175] King Hiram also sent specialized artisans, such as Hiram (son of the widow from Naphtali) who was a gifted bronze worker. His presence in Jerusalem heaped additional prestige onto Solomon.[176] The commissioning of an alien artisan would not have been a revolutionary gesture for Solomon's part; the exchange of specialized labor between kings was commonplace in the ancient Near East.[177] It was this exchange between kingdoms that gave the First Temple its Phoenician design:

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174. Cross, "The Tabernacle," 64.

175. J.A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), 18; apparently Hiram was not happy with the towns that Solomon gave him as payment for the construction material (1 Kgs 9:12).

176. 1 Kgs 7:13: "He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father had been a Tyrian, a coppersmith. He was endowed with skill and ability, and talent for executing all work in bronze"; perhaps Hiram was willing to take on the work because his mother was an Israelite; "during the first millennium the diplomatic exchange of specialists was replaced by pillage" with the consequence that labor—and therefore techniques and artistic styles—were dispersed as a result of subsequent state deportations in the wake of conquer, Matthews, 465.

177. Matthews, 465.

> The architects of the temple were Phoenicians; it is thus likely that the design and ornamentation of the new temple was for the most part carried out in accordance with Phoenician traditions. Solomon wanted to give his people and his city a temple superior to anything Canaan had to offer. It is therefore natural that the king turned to the rich kingdom of Tyre, both for materials and for an architect. It is probable that all the work done by Hiram the coppersmith [sic] who had been called in from Tyre to work in his temple (1 Kings 7:13 ff.) was in the Phoenician style. Even the cherubim in the d^{e}bir (1 Kings 6:23) and the sculptures representing cherubim and palms, which were placed in the *d^{e}bir* and *hekal*, were probably Syro-Phoenician versions of Near Eastern themes. [178]

Can the account in 1 Kings 6-7 be accepted as an accurate historical reflection of the building activity during Solomon's reign?[179] It is likely that the Deuteronomistic Historian synthesized its report using existing authorities. The entire account, including the parity between Solomon and King Hiram, undoubtedly had some scribal tradition that influenced it. John Van Seeters favors the description having grown from a DtrH tradition with later emendations. The core text was some form of a document[180] probably "inspired" by Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian building inscriptions.[181]

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178. d^{e}bir=inner sanctuary, holy of holies, sanctum sanctorum; hekal=temple; Ahlstrom, 44-45.

179. Van Seters, John. "Solomon's Temple: Fact and Ideology in Biblical and Near Eastern Historiography." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997): 45.

180. Ibid., 46, further, "since there is so little evidence of Mesopotamian inscriptional style in the inscriptions of Syria-Palestine-Transjordan in the first millennium BCE, it would be very difficult to explain actual Mesopotamian influence on a royal inscription in Judah as early as the tenth century," ibid., 47.

181. Van Seters, 49, quoting Mowinckel, "In antiquity, there was never a body of official or religious documents preserved for posterity, to be consulted by later historians for their curiosity. There were literary works, part of the scribal library, and there were public monuments and display inscriptions for the glory of king or god."

The ark of the first period made it into the Temple at the beginning of the first millennium BCE, a time when the influence of Phoenician art was strongest.[182] King Solomon commissioned Phoenician artisans to conduct his extensive building program.

Because of the long-standing and well-established trade between Syria and Egypt, there was a strong tendency for Phoenician artisans to appropriate Egyptian motifs into their design language.[183] Numerous examples of luxury products, such as furniture and ivory moldings, attest to the similarities between Phoenician and Egyptian styles and motifs, particularly in the decorative arts.[184] Those Egyptian design influences would have been translated into monumental aspects of Phoenicia's architectural and sculptural program for Solomon: "One of the characteristics of the decorative or minor arts of the Levant is its close iconographic and organic relationship to the monumental arts."[185] It was a package deal: the artistic program that included the architectural superstructure of the First Temple also included the cultic objects associated with its interior.

To understand the impact of DtrH on P it will be important to compare the descriptions of P's ark with the Temple descriptions of DtrH. The first notable and most significant comparison relates to the cherubim. P's cherubim of hammered gold

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182. Shelby Brown, "Perspectives on Phoenician Art," *Biblical Archaeologist* 55, no.1 (March 1992): 6.

183. Alberto Green, "A Synchronism Between Early Dynastic Israel and the Twenty-First Dynasty of Egypt," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 3 (September 1978): 353; Gunter, 1543.

184. A Cypro-Archaic silver gilt bowl (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 74.51.4554) exemplifies the enduring wing motif that appear overtly Egyptian in design, Aruz, et al, *Beyond Babylon*, fig. 143, p. 446.

185. Caubet, 2678.

were attached to the ark, whose substrate was acacia wood. But inside DtrH's cedar-lined sanctuary (which was also plated with gold) two monumental cherubim sculptures of gilded olive wood flank the ark and cover it with their wings (1 Kgs 6:23).[186] As noted above, P's choice of acacia wood is curious, for if P were following DtrH it would have been logical that cedar or olive wood would have been the chosen base wood. P's choice of material hints that they were following a different antique tradition or "antiquating" their own tradition for historical accuracy. Another contrasting point between the two accounts recognizes that P authored an elaborate formalistic critique of the ark matrices, whereas DtrH made no mention at all of the ark's material characteristics, only that its carrying poles (staves) could be seen from the door to the inner sanctuary. The discord between P and DtrH regarding the description of the ark is notable. Did P, understanding that two monumental cherubim sculptures would have been impossible to transport in the desert, deliberately shrink them to fit on top of the ark?[187] A more tenable assumption would be that two sets of cherubim existed.

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186. "The cherubim may be understood to be a form of throne in the style of other Phoenician winged thrones. It was apparently a common Phoenician custom to furnish the *naos* with a cherubim throne. While there is no reference to a throne in the descriptions of the First Temple (1 Kgs 6) nevertheless the enthronement of YHWH in the d^{e}bir is well attested. We must therefore conclude that the two cherubim could be interpreted as a throne, as is suggested by the expression 'enthroned upon the cherubim,'" Keel, *Symbolism*, 168; there is no reason to doubt the existence of a cherubim throne of the Phoenician type in the First Temple, but "it does seem that the superhuman height of the cherubim was exaggerated at the expense of the YHWH cult statue originally seated on it," Niehr, 82.

187. Seow, "Ark in P," 190, it would have been a theological move by P to reduce the significance of the ark as a throne.

According to Friedman P wrote after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE and prior to the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE.[188] But not all modern theologians agree on the dating of P to a period earlier than the Babylonian exile. Morgenstern summarizes this theological position regarding a post-exilic dating:

> The substitution of the *'arown* for the golden image of the enthroned YHWH, the Phoenician origin of which were self-evident to everyone, must have symbolized popularly the triumph of the old, traditional pastoral religion over the newly introduced and still largely foreign Phoenician-Canaanite agricultural religion.[189]

With its deity "enthroned" and its earth-bound monarchy in place, the Israelites were ready to do business. Seow proposed that P wrote in exile and sought to demythologize the ark; the symbol that was once meant to denote the presence of YHWH (i.e. the Throne of YHWH) became just an ornate repository to hold the tablets.[190] Seen in this light, the description of the ark in Exodus is an elaborate art directive from YHWH (as divine Creative Director) to Moses describing a reliquary to contain the tablets of the covenant; the ark's function, according to Seow became "detheologized" and more utilitarian. P not only "dethroned" YHWH, but the God of Israel became dissociated from the ark entirely.[191] After Babylon invaded Jerusalem

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188. Friedman, *Who?* 188-189; P was written as an alternative to the JE redaction, ibid., 190.

189. Morgenstern, *Ark*, 259.

190. Seow, "The Ark in P," 187. cf. Gottwald, 139, who dates P ca. 550-450 BCE, either late exile or early restoration. The idea of the ark as repository for the tablets was not unique to P. If 1 Kgs 6:23 comes from DtrH then we need to understand the ark as a container for the covenant as earlier than Seow projects.

191. Seow, "Ark in P," 191.

and destroyed the First Temple, the ark vanished from history.[192] If the ark had become theologically irrelevant, why not eliminate it from the narrative?

First, the ark had been historically established in the accounts of DtrH, who drew from the earliest traditions (although DtrH was only marginally interested in the theology of the ark and its material provenance). Second, it would have been a futile endeavor for P (or anyone) to erase the ark from established traditions. From the position of the exiles, who were far from their religious center and homeland, the ark served as a symbol of solidarity, expectation and optimism. The understanding of the ark in P that arose during the exile was the result of a "crisis of faith" or a "cognitive dissonance in the wake of exile" reassuring the exiles that YHWH was still among them and that the covenant was still binding.[193] This was not so much a theological alteration meant to meet the demands of their unfortunate situation—a grand justification, a "pious fraud"[194] in the wake of apolitical failure[195]—but rather an act of sympathy: "P wrote a theology of comfort and hope."[196] The post-Temple priestly inkwell was filled with nostalgia for the First Temple, and the psychological value of preserving existing traditions linking the dislodged Israelites to their past would have been paramount for P. Priests had access to the First Temple and its inner sanctuary. Who else would have been able to recount with such intimacy and detail the most important cultic object of their Temple—the ark?

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192. Friedman, *Who?* 156.

193. Seow, "Ark in P," 191, Mettinger quoted.

194. Cross, "Tabernacle," 47, Wellhausen cited.

195. Ibid., 47, "the Priestly Code is a Utopian constitution drawn up by a downtrodden religious community to serve as a substitute for a political state."

196. Seow, "Ark in P," 189.

CONCLUSION

The art directive described in Exodus 25:10-22 is thought to be an embroidered description from the hands of Priestly authors. However, it has been shown that the ark as described by P could have been meticulously executed in all respects during the late second millennium BCE. Von Rad pointed out that it was easy to adapt the ark to "historical conditions."[197] We have seen the ark carried through Israelite chronology spanning nearly three quarters of a millennium. It would have been impossible for such a symbol to survive and evolve had not the tradition been founded by an object that existed in history. That object was based on an existing ark-like structure that originated during the late second-millennium Exodus from Egypt, and whose formal characteristics traced their provenance to Egypt. The general design concept of the ark that was reflected in P's mid-first millennium description was based in part on the original ark. The marginal Temple descriptions passed from DtrH had a minimal impact on P, if any impact at all.

Egyptian funerary boxes would have been a familiar model to the Israelites of the Exodus, and a gold-covered acacia box may very well have made it over the Reed Sea with them during their flight. That *'arown* did not contain *betyls*, or the tablets of commands from YHWH. Rather, it likely encased the mummified body of their

197. von Rad, *Old Testament*, 236.

patriarch, Joseph.[198] Was the ark of the ancient Israelites the descendent of an Egyptian sarcophagus? That must be examined in another time and context.

198. von Rad, *Old Testament*, footnote 237. Von Rad finds it unusual that the Israelites themselves refer to the ark as a "casket" and not as a throne, pointing to the possibility that the ark supplanted an even earlier tradition with an Egyptian provenance.

GLOSSARY

***CASTING**:*
The process of forming an object by pouring a molten or liquid substance into a mold until it solidifies and takes on the impression of the mold.
***CHASING**:*
Working a design into a metal from the front using a hammer and punches; procedure to finish a raw bronze casting.
***CLOISONNÉ**:*
Technique of enameling by which the enameling materials are contained in small cells (*cloisons*) of metal.
***ENGRAVING**:*
Technique in which metal is cut away with a tool known as a "graver" to form a design, done by either hand or machine.
***FAIENCE**:*
Fused quartz glazing technique when fired like ceramic and simulates precious stones, especially lapis lazuli.
***GESSO**:*
A thin white ground made of plaster, chalk used as an undercoating for painting or gilding.
***GILDING**:*
Process of covering substances such as silver, base metal, wood with a thin layer of gold.
GRANULATION:
Process of decorating a metal surface with tiny grains of metal.
GUM ARABIC:
Sticky paste derived from sap of acacia tree used as an adhesive and a vehicle in paints.
INLAY:
Materials such as stones, gems, woods and metals are inserted and cemented into the surface of another material and ground down to create a smooth surface.
INGOT:
Metal formed into a bar or brick by pouring molten metal into a mold.
***LAPIDARY**:*
Craftsperson that cuts, facets, engraves and polishes gemstones; the art of stone cutting
***LEAF**:*
Gold that has been pounded into very thing sheets used for gilding.
***REPOUSSÉ**:*
Raised high relief design on the front of a metal object made by hammering, embossing or punching the reverse side of the metal to form the design from the backside out.
***SOLDERING**:*
A method of joining metal parts or pieces together by melting another metal alloy with a lower melting temperature at the joining point.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANET Ancient Near Eastern Texts
BDB Brown Driver & Briggs
CANE Civilizations of the Ancient Near East
JSB Jewish Study Bible
OCB Oxford Companion to the Bible
Strong's The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible

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