

firmly compartmentalized from the partible loci of their agency, which were altered in ways that initially mitigated their accessibility, their private reproduction, and their vulnerability. This allowed the media to adequately presence the deity's agency while the divine self was asserted to be located elsewhere, such as in the heavens or exclusively in the Jerusalem temple. These authors and editors trod a precarious line, however, in light of the risk that this compartmentalization could incentivize worship of the loci of agency (as we saw above with the bronze serpent, Nehushtan). Narratives could be produced to malign that worship, but authorities also developed certain characteristics for that media—such as locating them within authoritative texts—that also proved to be effective and durative.⁵

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

According to the biblical texts, the ark of the covenant (*'ārôn habbārīt*) was first and foremost a box.⁶ The vast majority of the 202 uses of *'ārôn* in the Hebrew Bible refer to YHWH's cultic object, but the term is also used generically, as in Gen 50:26, in which Joseph's corpse was embalmed and placed in an *'ārôn*, and 2 Kgs 12:10–11, in which Jehoiada placed an *'ārôn* alongside the altar for the collection of money (cf. 2 Chr 24:8, 10–11). The more specialized use of the term in reference to YHWH's cult object derives from this generic sense, which is why the former almost always occurs in a construct phrase, such as the ark *of the testimony* (*'ārôn hā'ēdut*, Exod 25:22), the ark *of the covenant* (*'ārôn habbārīt*, Josh 3:6), the ark *of YHWH* (*'ārôn YHWH*, Josh 3:13), or the ark *of (the) Deity* (*'ārôn [hā] 'ēlōhīm*, 1 Sam 3:3).

If YHWH's material presencing is rooted in the frameworks and conventions of the surrounding cultures, as I have argued, then the ark of the covenant ought to parallel, in form and function, presencing media from surrounding societies, and this is precisely what we find. Most simply, it was said to be stored, as with other cultic media, in the most holy space in the tent shrine and in the temple. David Aaron (2001, 172–75) has highlighted an interesting observation regarding the ark's function within the temple in a late segment of Exodus attributed to P.

⁵ As we will see, there was an additional rhetorical campaign toward both the textualization of the vehicles of divine agency and the ritualization of the texts of the law.

⁶ The cognates terms suggest closely related meanings. Issam Halayqa (2008, 61) glosses “chest” for Ugaritic *arn*, “chest,” “box,” and “coffin,” for Phoenician *'rn*, “ossuary” and “coffin” for Punic *'rn*, and “sarcophagus” for Epigraphic Hebrew *'rn* (cf. del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2003, 1.104). The Septuagint primarily renders *kibōtos*, “box, chest, coffer,” although the translator of the 2 Chronicles passages (2 Chr 24:8, 10–11) rendered *glōssokomon*, “box, money bag, coffin.” The ark of the covenant was likely known in its earliest iterations as the ark of YHWH (*'ārôn YHWH*), the ark of El (*'ārôn 'ēl*), or the ark of deity (*'ārôn 'ēlōhīm*).