

CONCLUSION

The ark of the covenant and the *kābôd* served to presence the deity in a variety of ways throughout their occurrences in the biblical literature. They did not function as a means of rhetorically severing the deity's presence from material media, but rather as a means of renegotiating the precise nature of that presencing. For the ark, this involved compartmentalizing the vehicles of agency from those of the deity's self and subordinating the former to the latter, resulting in the "secondary divine agent" status described in Pongratz-Leisten's (2011) model. The ark was described employing a variety of conventions associated with the nature and function of presencing media from cognate societies, and it came to be viewed as a material medium which the deity could inhabit or could abandon. The *kābôd* was not subject to the volatilities of a human-made cultic object, and so it was a more rhetorically flexible vehicle of divine agency that came to be used to abstractly mark as well as obscure the deity's presence. In both cases, a salient rhetorical goal appears to be the creation of space between the deity's body and their people. The deity was still accessible through a variety of acts, such as prayer, but their material presence was compartmentalized, obscured, and often more abstract. The growing use and salience of text was one of the technological innovations that facilitated the maintenance and enforcement of such an abstract conceptualization of deity.

The ark and the *kābôd* were among the most visible and concrete presencing media from the Iron Age preserved by the texts of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods. While their relationships to the agency and identity of YHWH were renegotiated in order to respond to pressing rhetorical needs regarding the deity's presence, for the exilic worshippers of YHWH, both pieces of media were also conspicuously absent. The temple was gone, and with it, the ark of the covenant and any pillar of fire or cloud of smoke that might have visibly manifested the deity's presence to previous generations. They existed only in written, spoken, and performed tradition. This reality imposed additional prosocial exigencies upon authorities and community leaders whose interests were tangled up with the insularity and survival of the Israelite/Judahite identity. In the absence of the temple and the divine presence and oversight it helped facilitate, other strategies for social cohesion and for conceptualizing the relationship of YHWH to their people would come to the fore, and particularly through the medium of text. It is to those strategies that I now turn.