

enthroned box in the Tiglath-Pileser III relief discussed above are representative of the kind of media used in conjunction with shrine models, those media could have been miniature versions of full-scale divine images used in larger sites. The most explicit examples we have of full-scale divine images used in an Israelite/Judahite cultic site are the stelai that were located in the cella of the Arad temple. We have already seen that such stelai were ubiquitous across the regions inhabited by ancient Israel and Judah, and the biblical texts are replete with references to cultic stelai, so they are likely to have been broadly representative of the type of divine image employed in Israel and Judah. Tablets could very easily function as miniature stelai, and here the presencing function of cultic objects and of text converge (Watts 2016). The significance of this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7, but given the ubiquity of stelai in and around Israel and Judah, and the general paucity of anthropomorphic statuary, the ark may have been deployed at some point as a portable shrine model that housed one or more stelai that presenced the deity or the deity and their consort.

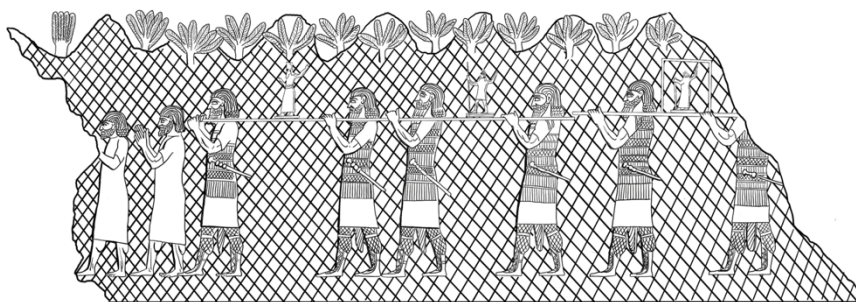


Figure 5.3. Sennacherib wall relief depicting cultic objects being carried off from a conquered city. Drawing by the author.

Scott Noegel (2015) has argued for Egypt's sacred bark as the primary conceptual seedbed for the ark. There were many variations on the theme, but a sacred bark was essentially a miniature boat that held either a coffin or a closed shrine model, and was transported with carrying poles. Unlike the clay models that have been discovered all over Iron Age Israel and Judah, but like the (late) description of the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:10–16), the Egyptian barks could be constructed of wood and covered in gold plating. They were frequently flanked by winged protective creatures reminiscent of cherubim, and could also be veiled with a curtain or canopy. As Noegel points out, the Hebrew term *'ārōn* could also refer to a coffin (see Gen 50:1–14, 26).

In Num 10:35–36 and in 1 Sam 4–6, the ark seems to function exclusively as a war palladium that presences the deity (Römer 2019, Finkelstein and Römer