

2020).<sup>9</sup> Its role as a container for the law or as a throne or footstool is entirely absent, as is its association with cherubim.<sup>10</sup> This suggests the passages may represent some of the earliest recoverable memories of the ark, before its nature and function were altered to serve the changing priorities and sensitivities of Judah's authorities. Numbers 10:35–36, known as the Song of the Ark (and also quoted in Ps 68:2), looks to be an archaic poem preserved within a pre-P seam that joins two larger P strands (Levine 1993, 311). As mentioned in the introduction, it seems to equate the activity of the ark with the activity of YHWH.<sup>11</sup>

When the ark set out [*binsōa' hā'ārōn*], Moses would say,

“Advance [*qūmā*], O YHWH!

Your enemies shall scatter!

Those who hate you shall flee from your presence!”

And when it rested [*ūbnuḥōh*], he would say,

“Bring back [*šūbā*], O YHWH,

the ten thousand thousands of Israel!”<sup>12</sup>

First Samuel 4–6, which is widely understood as an early narrative embedded within a later Dtr layer, tells of the loss of the ark in battle with the Philistines at Ebenezer, its recovery in Beth-Shemesh, and its subsequent installation in Kiriath-

---

<sup>9</sup> Sommer (2009, 93–94) and Natalie May (2015) both compare the ark and the tabernacle with Neo-Assyrian military practices related to the *qersu*, or portable shrine. In English, the word “palladium” has been used for centuries to refer to some manner of cultic object that offers protection within military contexts.

<sup>10</sup> The closest the text comes to referring to any contents is the muddled statement in 1 Sam 6:19 that seventy (or 50,070) Beth-Shemites who “looked in the ark” (*rā'ū ba'ārōn*) were struck down by YHWH (cf. Tsumura 2007, 226). If Exod 33:20 is in the background of this verse, then to look at the ark's contents is to look upon the face of the deity. In the LXX, however, 1 Sam 6:19a reads, “The children of Jeconiah were not happy with the men of Beth-Shemesh, because they saw the ark of the Lord. And he struck down 50,070 men.” Miller and Roberts (2008, 77) believe the NAB's reconstruction is preferable: “The descendants of Jeconiah did not join in the celebration with the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the Lord, and seventy of them were struck down.” Ted Lewis (2020, 874, n. 77) however, agrees with P. Kyle McCarter (1980, 131, 136–37) that the deaths were likely precipitated by the lack of Levites handling the ark, and with Levine (1993, 174) that their addition in verse 15 is a later interpolation.

<sup>11</sup> See also Ps 132:8, which similarly equates the activity of YHWH and the ark: “Ascend, O YHWH, to your resting place—you and the ark of your strength [*attā wa'ārōn 'uzzekā*]!”

<sup>12</sup> This translation is influenced by Levine 1993, 318.