

Jearim.¹³ According to 1 Sam 4, after it is retrieved from Shiloh to accompany the troops into battle, the ark fails to secure victory for the Israelites and is captured by the Philistines, who bring it back to their temple at Ashdod. After the ark's first night in the Philistine temple at Ashdod alongside their deity, Dagon, the latter's statue is knocked over.¹⁴ After the second night, it is knocked over and its head and hands are severed. As the head and hands are important symbols of perception and action, this severing rhetorically renders the Philistine deity ignorant and impotent. The city is then stricken with a plague, so the ark is sent to Gath and then Ekron, where similar events take place (1 Sam 5:6–10). The Philistines have no choice but to return the ark to Israel, so they put it on a cart pulled by two cows, along with some offerings to appease the anger they have stoked, and set it loose. The text makes a point of highlighting that the cows set out directly for Beth-Shemesh and stopped upon arrival (1 Sam 6:12–14), as if guided by some agency (or perhaps driven like a chariot). At this point, in verse 15, the presencing function of the ark again comes to the fore. After the residents set up the ark next to or upon (*'el*) a “great stone” (*'eben gədôlâ*), they offer burnt offerings and sacrifices “to YHWH” (*la-YHWH*).

Sommer (2009, 101–7) argues that the Deuteronomic editors have adapted this narrative to argue *against* the perception that the ark presences the deity, but also to maintain a degree of tension between that perception and its rejection. The clearest expressions of the ark's presencing functions, for Sommer, are put into the mouths of individuals who don't know any better. For instance, the Israelite elders call for the ark before the battle, hoping that either YHWH or the ark (the third masculine singular verb is not clear) “will come into our midst and save us from the hand of our enemies” (1 Sam 4:3). This reflects, for Sommer, the erroneous notion associated with the “Zion-Sabaoth” tradition that Zion (Israel) was invincible as a result of YHWH's presence, facilitated by the ark. The hated Philistines realize the ark is present in 1 Sam 4:6 and equate the ark and the deity, lamenting in verse 7, “the Deity has come into the camp!”¹⁵ Sommer (2009, 104–5) suggests as well that the name that the widow of Phinehas gives her child as she dies following delivery may reflect the understanding that the loss of the ark equals the loss of the divine presence/body. The name Ichabod (*'î-kābôd*)

¹³ For a discussion of the likely core of the narrative, the archaeological data associated with the mentioned sites, and the social memory that may be indexed by it, see Finkelstein and Römer 2020.

¹⁴ Note the text refers to the cultic image simply as *dāgôn*, “Dagon,” reflecting—perhaps antagonistically—the identification of the image as the deity.

¹⁵ The verb *bā'* is singular in verse 7, but verse 8 uses the word *'ēlōhīm* in conjunction with a plural pronoun and a plural participle. Sommer (2009, 104) notes the Septuagint has the plural in verse 7, suggesting the plural reading in verse 7 may be older (cf. Miller and Roberts 2008, 45, n. 21).