

The Ark Narrative(s) of 1 Sam *4:1b–7:1 / 2 Sam 6* between Philistia, Jerusalem, and Assyria

A New Approach for a Historical Contextualization and Literary-Historical Classification

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1. Jerusalem and the West: The Ark's Journey through Philistia

The Ark narratives in the Books of Samuel in 1 Sam 4–7:1.2a and 2 Sam 6:1–23 report how after a loss in battle, the Ark fall into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 4:5–12), travels as a spoil of war through multiple stops in enemy territory, and after some difficulties ultimately arrives in Jerusalem in a large festival procession (2 Sam 6:1–11.12–19). It is then brought by David into the royal capital, namely: to its “place,” maqom, “inside the tent” (2 Sam 6:17: *לְתוֹךְ הַאֹהֶל*). Its route stretches from its original sanctuary in Shiloh in the northern Samarian hill county (1 Sam 4:3.4.12¹) through Ebenezer (1 Sam 4:1.5; 5:1), and initially to the west, along the coast to Ashdod (1 Sam 5:1–8). From there, it continues eastwards through Gath (1 Sam 5:9) and Ekron (1 Sam 5:10–12) and eventually back into friendly territory, reaching Beth-Shemesh (1 Sam 6:12–20), Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam 6:21–7:2a) and finally, after a 20-year hiatus (1 Sam 7:2a), Jerusalem (2 Sam 6).

The present essay focuses on a literary-historical classification and historical dimension tangible behind the Journey of the Ark established in the narrative of 1 Sam 5:1–7:1.2a: What role does the itinerary play for the Ark's larger function in the narrative and how does its possible, but highly controversial connection with 2 Sam 6 come into play? Then, a movement from the west towards Jerusalem is presented that has rarely been taken into account. For reasons addressed below,² the field has instead focused primarily on the narrative's geographic north/south references and on either the transfer of the Ark from Shiloh to Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam 7:1) and Jerusalem (2 Sam 6*), or on the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah as original contexts to which the individual traditions taken up in 1 Sam 4–6 (Northern Kingdom) and 2 Sam 6 (Judah) can be assigned.

¹ On the archaeological and literary-historical findings from Shiloh, see now the monograph from KNITTEL 2019.

² For an overview of research, see below, section 2.

Alongside the literary-historical reappraisal of the issue, a particular cultural-historical and religio-political background of the narrative is explored that has rarely been undertaken in this context. In my opinion, this aspect constitutes a central element within the Ark's journey that critically influences both the fundamental dynamics of the narrative as well as its theological intention: the practice, well attested in ancient Near Eastern sources, of the deportation of cult statuary. This practice, termed "godnapping" in recent literature, is particularly well known from Assyrian contexts.

A second aspect of inquiry is functionally related to the first: Why are the Philistines introduced in connection with the Ark Narrative as – at least within the narrative itself – the "primary nemesis of Israel"? Their existence and threat to Israel guide the fate of Saul and David, beginning in 1 Sam 4 and lasting until the latter emerges victorious in 2 Sam 5:17–25. In its present literary context, the Ark Narrative is then taken up again in 2 Sam 6. So, what is the functional connection intended by the authors between the "godnapping" of the Ark and the Philistine threat, and in what time period is the composition of such a narrative imaginable? Studies on the subject have rarely understood the Philistine threat as noteworthy, and instead as a possible result of historical "background noise" stemming from the Philistines now being seen as an influential and virtually-omnipresent power in the southern Levant during the Iron Age I and Early Iron Age II, the context in which the narrative is often situated. Alternatively, the Philistines have also been seen – interpreting the narrative like a majority of the field as a reflection of the Babylonian Exile – as allegorical and thus a general reflection of all the possible varieties of oppression in the exile (more on this below).

This essay first proceeds with an overview of current studies on the Ark (section 2), followed by a discussion of the relevant biblical texts, 1 Sam 4* and 1 Sam 5–6* (section 3), in order to relate the historical practice of god statue deportation (section 4) with the Ark Narrative (section 5).

2. The Ark Narrative(s) in 1 & 2 Sam in Current Research

In order to better define the issue in question, some categorizing is appropriate at this point. The narratives on the fate of the Ark have famously been transmitted not as a contiguous narrative, but rather as two narrative complexes: first 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1.2a, which includes the notice of the Ark's loss in battle, the death of the Elides, and the itinerary of the Ark's journey through Philistia until it reaches its (temporary; 1 Sam 7:2a) resting place in Kiriath-Jearim. The Ark is then mentioned again only in 2 Sam 6, which, in turn, reports the circumstances of its transfer to Jerusalem by David. When investigating the historical genesis of these narratives, one must refer to the influential 1926 work of Leonhard Rost. His thesis postulated that the oldest version of the Ark stories in 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6 originally comprised a literary unity. This version (1 Sam 4:1b–18a.19–21; 1 Sam 5:1–11b.12; 1 Sam 6:1–3b.4.10–14.16.19–21; 1 Sam 7:1; 2 Sam 6:1–15.17–20a³) then belonged to the backbone of a pre-deuteronomistic composition of the Books of Samuel. This Ark Narrative contained the *heiros logos* of the most important

³ ROST 1926:14.

cultic object of the Solomonic Temple and was integrated by the Rostian “Succession Narrator” into his Solomonic-period work. Rost cited three observations in support of the theory of an ark narrative’s independence:

- 1) In the larger literary context of Rost’s “Ark Narrative I” (1 Sam 5–6*), the figure of Samuel plays a critical role (esp. 1 Sam 1–3) – but not the narrative itself, which speaks for its original independence.
- 2) 2 Sam 6, the “Ark Narrative II,” belongs neither to the History of David’s Rise (henceforth “HDR”) nor to the Succession Narrative; rather, the chapter seamlessly follows 1 Sam 4–6*, and
- 3) vocabulary, style, and “religious thought-world”⁴ in both Ark narratives speak for their original connection.

Rost’s propositions have long found wide acceptance in the field,⁵ which may be due to Martin Noth having taken it up in relatively unmodified form in his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*,⁶ with the Rostian Ark Narrative quickly becoming seen as one of the three (with the Succession Narrative and the HDR) basic pre-deuteronomistic sources of the Books of Samuel. Of course, after nearly one hundred years of existence, Rost’s thesis has also received its share of criticism and rarely finds support in current discourse. While it would not be possible to discuss the entire debate in detail within the context of this essay – see instead the existing treatment of research by Erik Eynikel⁷ – attention should be called here to two central problems that have fundamentally shaped the current literary-historical debate:

2.1 *The Challenge to the Unity of 1 Sam 4–6* and 2 Sam 6**

The dispute of Rost’s thesis has come only lately, and consequently, the idea of a literary independence of 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6 had not found much support in recent approaches. The actual scope,⁸ beginning and end,⁹ linguistic¹⁰ and syntax-structural¹¹

⁴ ROST 1926:8.

⁵ Cf. CAMPBELL 1975:28–54; SCHICKLBERGER 1973:17–25; SMELIK 1989:128–144; HENTSCHEL 2004:233–234; STOLZ 1980:39–52.212–218; cf. MCCARTER 1980:23: “This hypothesis has been among the most durable of modern scholarship.”

⁶ NOTH 1943:62–75.

⁷ For an overview of research on the Ark Narrative, see the thorough treatment of the state of the field by EYNIKEL 2000:88–106, which takes into account the literature up to 2000. For the previous two decades, research on the Ark Narrative has remained quire straightforward; the following essays on the Ark Narrative since Eynikel may be added: BRUEGGEMANN 2002; SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 2003; PORZIG 2009; DIETRICH 2011; as well as the current publications from Finkelstein and Römer, to be understood within the context of their ongoing excavations at Kiriath-Jearim; see FINKELSTEIN/RÖMER et al. 2018:31–83; RÖMER 2019:95–108.

⁸ FOHRER 1982:8–17.

⁹ MILLER/ROBERTS 1977:18–36.

¹⁰ SCHICKLBERGER 1973:12.

¹¹ SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 2003:328.

uniformity, editorial work,¹² genre,¹³ and intent¹⁴ of the narrative have all been hotly debated. Some contradictory statements in the texts also seem to support doubting the original unity of an Ark narrative.¹⁵ This has recently become the predominant position in the field and is connected with the names Thomas Römer (2019), Israel Finkelstein (2018), Peter Porzig (2009), Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger (1993; 2003), and Patrick Miller/Jack Roberts (1977).¹⁶

Above all, three arguments are cited against an original connection:

- 1) Kiriath-Jearim is the Ark's resting place after its return (1 Sam 7:1.2a), while David collects the Ark from Baale-judah (2 Sam 6:2). Only in later tradition (Josh 15:9b: *הַגְּבוּל בְּעֵלְהָ הָיָא קִרְיַת יִצְרָיִם*; and the correction of the location of 2 Sam 6:2 in 4QSam^a) have both places been identified with each other.¹⁷
- 2) 2 Sam 6 can hardly be followed immediately by 1 Sam 7:1.2a, as the figure of David is not specifically introduced in 2 Sam 6, meaning that the text in its present form appears to presuppose at least parts of the preceding David narratives.
- 3) There are tensions regarding the cultic personnel, as while Eleazar, a son of Abinadab is consecrated in 1 Sam 7:1 as priest of the Ark, 2 Sam 6:2 speaks of Abinadab's sons Uzzah and Ahio, who act not as priests, but as cart drivers. Thus, two independent Ark narratives may be assumed, which were redactionally attached to one another only at a later point in time.

Recent studies have also shown that the possibility of the first Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6* having been subjected to a process of literary integration with 1 Sam 1–3 should be considered. At issue is whether the fate of the Elides already belonged to the original part of the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4 or was added later by the Deuteronomist in order to link the Ark Narrative with the tale of Samuel's youth in Shiloh (1 Sam 1–3).¹⁸ In the first case, at least the part of 1 Sam 1–3 about the transgressions of the sons of Eli in 2 Sam 12–17*.22–25* would then be pre-deuteronomistic; in the latter case, the Ark Narrative would comprise merely 1 Sam 4:1b–4a.5–11a.

An additional argument for the independence of 2 Sam 6 points to its integration within the context of 2 Sam 5–7* and thus within a Judahite-Davidide context, with 2 Sam 6* being tightly linked to the establishment of Jerusalem as David's royal capital in 2 Sam 5:1–16. The transfer of the Ark is then understood as reflecting the transfer of ownership of Canaanite Jerusalem to YHWH, the god of David, and thus as part of the inauguration of Jerusalem as the seat of David's rule.¹⁹ Religio-historical parallels are

¹² WONNEBERGER 1992:274–283.

¹³ STOEBE 1973:127–128.

¹⁴ CAMPBELL 2003:193–201.

¹⁵ On discussion of the differences and the arguments cited for or against the uniformity, see EYNIKEL 2000:90–97.

¹⁶ FINKELSTEIN/RÖMER et al. 2018:31–83; RÖMER 2019:95–108; SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 1993:197*–211*; 2003:323–338; PORZIG 2009:135–156; MILLER/ROBERTS 1977:23–35.

¹⁷ FRITZ 1994:157–158.167.183–184.

¹⁸ See EYNIKEL 2000; and HUTZLI 2007:197–202 (with a discussion of the respective arguments).

¹⁹ Cf. FLANAGAN 1983:364–371.

well-attested in the ancient Near Eastern genre of texts involving the return of spoils of war (especially cultic implements) to the conquerors' home sanctuary. This text genre is devoted to the dedication of the royal residence and thus royal legitimation.²⁰ Accordingly, David acts in 2 Sam 6 both as king and as cultic protagonist in full accord with the ancient Near Eastern ideals of kingship. In this context, 2 Sam 7 clarifies the vital question already raised in the Michal episode in 2 Sam 6:20–23 concerning the endurance of the Davidic monarchy.²¹

2.2 Dating the Ark Narrative(s)

Functionally connected to this question of uniformity (or lack thereof) is the question regarding the dating of the Ark Narrative and/or its constituent traditions. The debate essentially oscillates between two extremes. Some scholars underscore (like Rost) the historicity of the reports recognizable in the Ark Narrative(s) covering an early phase of the history of Israel (generally the tenth or ninth century BCE). In his study of the narratives of the Ark's journey, Gösta Werner Ahlström formulated it as follows:

“The so-called ark narrative reads as an artful piece of propaganda of religion-political importance. It may be a product of a pan-Israelite doctrine which viewed the people of Israel-Judah as a unit prior to the emergence of the monarchy. Its purpose is to show the emergence of Yahweh as an ‘empire god.’”²²

Walter Dietrich may be considered as one of the prominent supporters of a modified and modernized version of Rost's thesis in the current discussion. While taking up the previous debate, Dietrich maintained against criticism that “one should not [...] envision the Ark Narrative as a smooth, continuous text” (here addressing arguments against the questioned cohesiveness of 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6), “but rather [...] as a composition from older traditions (1 Sam 4; 2 Sam 6; 1 Kgs 8) with interpretive and linking elements from the hand of the redactor (particularly 1 Sam 5–6, but also 1 Sam 4:6–8a and the ‘one enthroned upon the cherubim’ in 1 Sam 4:4 // 2 Sam 6:2),”²³ with these clearly reflecting events of the ninth century BCE. Dietrich referred in this context particularly to the mention of Gath in 1 Sam 5 as part of the Philistine Pentapolis – a historical constellation “that did not exist from the late ninth century onwards, after the decline of Gath.”²⁴ The first composition of the Ark Narrative then stands in *temporal* and *functional* relation with the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722 BCE). After the loss of the North, Judah takes over the ownership of the Ark. Per Dietrich, the numerous Exodus references and allusions within the Ark narratives reveal their basic intention, being told by Judean authors in a way that *outdoes* the exodus tradition, which Dietrich identifies as “Northern-Israelite specific.”²⁵

²⁰ See MILLER/ROBERTS 1977:77–86 for the numerous parallels.

²¹ Cf. SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 1993:197*–211*; 2003:323–338.

²² AHLSTRÖM 1984:141.

²³ DIETRICH 2014:256.

²⁴ DIETRICH 2011:264. Finkelstein reasoned similarly in his previous approach, cf. FINKELSTEIN 2002:159.

²⁵ See DIETRICH 2014:256; 2011:202–248, 261–300; 2019:549–586.

Thus,

“the period after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel [should be] considered, as northern traditions increasingly arrived in the south. The subtext of the Ark Narrative would then be that, though the exodus tradition may have lost its original promotion with the Northern Kingdom, the ability of Yhwh to handle the enemies of Israel has not been lost.”²⁶

In 2002, Israel Finkelstein opted for a similar chronological classification: “A few texts, such as the Ark Narrative and the stories about the importance of Gath, seem to portray late Iron I (tenth century) and early Iron II realities.”²⁷ This is remarkable considering Finkelstein’s opinion that all other mentions of the Philistines in the Old Testament reflect circumstances of the late monarchic period (namely under Josiah); for example, his conclusions in the same place of the same article: “The biblical references to the Philistines do not contain any memory of early Iron I (twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE) events or cultural behaviour.” Finkelstein has since moved away from this assessment of the Ark Narrative on grounds handled below. First, however, to the other side of the historical contextualization: A solid majority of the field situates the Ark Narrative in the *exilic* or *post-exilic* period, interpreting the “deportation” of the Ark in 1 Sam 5–6 as an allegory of the people of Israel during the Babylonian Exile and the return of the Ark to Jerusalem as a corresponding impulse towards hopefulness among the exiles. The entire conception then clearly takes a deuteronomistic shape (see esp. van der Toorn/Houtman,²⁸ Smelik²⁹ and Van Seters³⁰); the idol polemics recognizable in 1 Sam 5:1–8 also point to this period.³¹ Yet this exilic/postexilic dating is hardly necessary; the chapters on the Ark contain hardly any deuteronomistic language, and even then, those sections are easily identifiable as later additions – as in the case of the idol polemic in 1 Sam 5:3–5.7b (more detail on this below). One must also ask why, given the suggested historical context, the Philistines of all people would have been chosen to reflect the exilic experience. From the sixth century on, the Philistines no longer posed a serious threat; the picture of the enemy evoked in the Bible would not have made for an automatic, direct association with the Babylonians who had just invaded the country.

The newest iteration of the argument concerning the independence of the two Ark narratives has recently been put forth by Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer. Their propositions are tied to the new excavations at Kiriath-Jearim, which they have been conducting since 2017 as a *Joint Project of Tel Aviv University* and the *Collège de*

²⁶ DIETRICH 2014:256.

²⁷ FINKELSTEIN 2002:159.

²⁸ VAN DER TOORN/HOUTMAN 1994:209–231.

²⁹ SMELIK 1989:128–144, esp. 142–144.

³⁰ VAN SETERS 1997:349–350.

³¹ The following opt for an exilic or postexilic dating: SMELIK 1989:128–144; VAN SETERS 1997:346–353; PORZIG 2009:135–156. DIEBNER 1989/90:92 sees in the Ark Narrative an Israelite (= Judahite) conflict with the Hellenism of the third through first centuries BCE (the dominant factor being the Dagon temple in Ashdod, which was first constructed in the Hasmonean period, cf. 1 Sam 5; as well as a chain of evidence connecting an identification of the Ark with the storage of the tablets of the Torah within it – the formation of the Pentateuch only being concluded towards the end of the Hellenistic period).

France across three small areas on-site.³² Finkelstein/Römer propose dating the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4:1–7:1 to the first half of the eighth century BCE, to the time of Jeroboam II. In any case, this narrative concludes with the Ark being placed at Kiriath-Jearim for safekeeping (1 Sam 7:1.2a). Three primary suppositions guide their dating proposal:

- a) 1 Sam 4:1–7:1 forms an Ark tradition independent of 2 Sam 6*;
- b) Kiriath-Jearim constitutes a *Northern Israelite border town*; and
- c) the goal of the Ark Narrative is to supersede Shiloh as the location of the Ark and to legitimize its new location, Kiriath-Jearim, as its sanctuary through an etiological narrative.³³

Here they refer to the archaeological findings: the excavation results published in 2018 have shown that in the Iron Age IIB, a flat, rectangular, 150m x 110m-wide podium was constructed atop the hill, supported by massive, 3m-wide walls. According to the excavators, the podium's construction traces back to Israelite construction activity under Jeroboam II. Information on the results of the 2019 season given verbally by the excavators seems to be able to limit the dating to the first half of the eighth century, with the podium's retaining wall seemingly excavated in 2019. According to Römer, 1 Sam 4:1–7:1 legitimates the new sanctuary built by Jeroboam II in Kiriath-Jearim following the destruction of Shiloh:

“The best candidate for the construction of the sanctuary would then be Jeroboam II, who built the sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel delimiting the North and the South; consequently, it is possible that the king conducted the same policy at Kiriath-Jearim. One could thus hypothetically see the history of the Ark in 1 Sam 4:1–7:1* (in a version shorter than the current text) as having been written during the reign of Jeroboam II as an etiological account legitimizing Kiriath-Jearim as the new sanctuary of the Ark.”³⁴

Finkelstein/Römer further elaborate:

“Accordingly, in the case of a North Kingdom affiliation [for Kiriath-Jearim], the elevated platform was built in order to accommodate an Israelite administration compound, including a temple (of the Ark, which also served as a border sanctuary?), aimed at dominating the vassal kingdom of Judah.”³⁵

³² The preliminary excavation report from the 2017 season: FINKELSTEIN/RÖMER et al. 2018, with a short overview of the results also in FINKELSTEIN 2018:5. The excavation's website gives an up-to-date overview of the current progress on the project (<https://kiriathjearim.wordpress.com/>). For the results of previous excavations as well, see MCKINNY et al. 2018:30–49.

³³ FINKELSTEIN/RÖMER et al. 2018:60; FINKELSTEIN 2018:5; RÖMER 2019:95–108 (esp. 101–102.105). The narrative has been described before as a legitimization narrative, such as in MILLER/ROBERTS 1977:23–35; SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 2003:323–338; PORZIG 2009:135–156 (albeit with differing historical contextualizations).

³⁴ RÖMER 2019:102. See also FINKELSTEIN/RÖMER et al. 2018:60: “It is also noteworthy that the Ark Narrative in 1 Samuel 4: 1–7: 1*, telling the story of the transfer of the Ark from Shiloh to Kiriath-jearim, seems to have originated in the North. The goal was probably to legitimize Kiriath-jearim as the ‘new’ shrine of the Ark.”

³⁵ FINKELSTEIN/RÖMER et al. 2018:60.

The archaeological perspective is especially welcome in the context of a debate that has largely been based on literary-historical arguments. Yet, as important as the excavation results are, the arguments put forth here are not particularly convincing. In the biblical tradition, Kiriath-Jearim is a *Judean* settlement at the gates of Jerusalem; based on the various biblical findings, one may concede that it was located in a controversial area between Judah and Benjamin³⁶ – but that it was so clearly a Northern Kingdom outpost with a border sanctuary *à la* Bethel and Dan does not appear to be as plausible. The narrative’s perspective is also already betrayed by the stop in Beth-Shemesh in the northern Shephelah mentioned immediately beforehand (1 Sam 6:12–20), as well as the mention of Gath in 1 Sam 5:8.9, which has historically been affiliated with Judean territory³⁷ and was likely even under Judean control for a short period during the reign of Hezekiah.³⁸ Thus, the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam seems – to anticipate the coming conclusions – much more likely to reflect *Judean* interests. The fact that Kiriath-Jearim, as the preliminary excavation results seem to show, likely played an important role in the history of Israel does not of course speak against this, instead explaining why the site appears in the Ark’s itinerary at all.

3. The Ark Narrative of 1 Sam 4:2–7:1.2a

3.1 A “Catastrophe Narrative” of the Loss of the “War Palladium” and the Demise of the Elides: 1 Sam 4:1b–22 as the Oldest Building Block of the Ark Narrative

The narratives about the Ark in 1 Sam are located in 1 Sam 4:1–7:2a. This narrative is not a literary unity and quite clearly contains traces of textual growth.³⁹ With 1 Sam 4 the Philistines take the stage in the *narrative world* of Samuel for the first time, being depicted across the Books of Samuel as the strongest enemies of Israel. The first two kings, Saul and David, stand in constant conflict with the Philistines just as Israel depicted here in premonarchic times. Beginning with the first narrative episode, 1 Sam 4:1b–22 reports of two battles lost against the Philistines at Ebenezer in northern Israel. After the first defeat (1 Sam 4:1b–3), the Ark is taken from Shiloh to the base camp, accompanied by the priests Hophni and Phineas, the sons of Eli. This immediately leads to exactly what the Israelites had hoped for: the Ark’s presence greatly intimidating the Philistines (1 Sam 4:4–9). Nevertheless, a second battle commences (1 Sam 4:10–11), which ends not only with the deaths of both sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas (v. 11), but also with another Israelite defeat. In the end, the Philistines steal the Ark from the battlefield. Then, the perspective of the narrative pivots to the fate of Eli and his family (1 Sam 4:12–22). The high priest of the Ark’s sanctuary in Shiloh

³⁶ On the biblical evidence, see KOCH 2017:344; also, MCKINNY et al. 2018:30–49; and VIEWEGER 2019:210–211.

³⁷ LEVIN 2017:232–240.

³⁸ As indicated by e.g., the Judean *lmlk*-jar handles found during the excavations in Gath (CHADWICK/MAEIR 2018:48–55); this would then explain why Mic 1:10 includes Gath in its list of *Judean* cities.

³⁹ See WONNEBERGER 1992:274–286; PORZIG 2009:135–156; DIETRICH 2011:202–245.

tragically dies after a messenger informs him of the death of his two sons and the loss of the Ark. The close connection between the Elide family and the fate of the Ark is particularly noticeable here (v. 17.21.22). The terrible news continues as Eli's daughter-in-law immediately goes into labor (v. 19–22); the mother dies in childbirth, but not without giving her son the peculiar name “I-kabod” (אֵי-קָבוֹד; v. 21). This is best translated as “Where is the Kabod (of YHWH)” and is given as its meaning in the narrative itself (v 21a.22a). The name thus appropriately interprets the character of the catastrophe from 1 Sam 4: with the abduction of the Ark, the קָבוֹד has been taken away from Israel, or – to get to the heart of Walter Brueggemann's interpretation of the name – “God is gone.”⁴⁰

Yet, Israel has not only lost its deity; the very existence of Israel itself is at stake here, as the fundamental connection between the deity and its people, which was foundational within the ancient Near Eastern worldview, is disrupted. From this perspective, the end of the Elide priesthood has consequences for all Israel and thus it is not the fate of the Ark standing at the center of 1 Sam 4:1b–22, but the fate of Israel.

Upon closer inspection, 1 Sam 4 contains relatively clear literary seams that point to editorial revisions:

- a) The deuteronomistic “judge” notice in v. 18b (See Judg 3:10; 4:4; 10:2.3; 12:7.8.9.11.14; 15:20; 16:31).
- b) The mention of the divine epithet “one enthroned upon the cherubim” (1 Sam 4:4: אֱלֹהֵי הַכְּרֻבִּים), which serve no purpose in this context; also found later in 2 Sam 6:2 and 1 Kgs 8:6–7 and generally presupposed by 1 Kgs 6:23–32.⁴¹
- c) Additionally – because of its enlarged context – also the explicit reference to the exodus in v. 6b–8 (especially in v. 8b: אֵלֹהֵי הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּקַלְמֶכָה בְּמַדְבָּר).⁴²
- d) The doublet in the concluding verses 21a.22a (“The glory/kabod has departed from Israel”). Though this can be taken as a stylistic device, it is more likely that the original narrative ended with v. 21 and the birth of Ichabod:

v. 21:

וַתִּקְרָא לְנֶעֱר אֵי-קָבוֹד לְאָמֶר
 אֵלֶּה קָבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
 אֵלֶּה-הָאֵלֹהִים אֲרוֹן הָאֵלֹהִים
 וְאֵלֶּה-הַמִּיָּה וְאִישָׁה:

And she named the child “I-Kabod,” saying:
 ‘The glory has been taken away from Israel,
 Because the Ark of God had been taken
 And because of her father-in-law and her husband.

Verse 22a was added later, in view of the addition of the Ark's journey narrative (see below).

- e) In its present context, the events of 1 Sam 4* are embedded in the narrative of Samuel (1 Sam 1–3) and the transgressions of the sons of Eli (1 Sam 2:12–17.22–25.27–

⁴⁰ BRUEGGEMANN 2002:33.

⁴¹ See RÖMER 2019:102–103.

⁴² DIETRICH 2011:211–212.

36; 3:11–14). Yet, Samuel himself appears neither in 1 Sam 4 nor in the entire Ark Narrative. This would point to the possibility of an independent development of 1 Sam 4*, that was only later integrated into the context of the Samuel narratives.

Accordingly, an *original narrative* can be delineated that likely comprised vv. 1b–6a.9–21. This forms a self-contained narrative with a limited purview, which can be interpreted with Walter Dietrich as a “catastrophe narrative” and reports on the *fate of Israel* as well as *the fate of the Elides*. As opposed to 1 Sam 5:1–7:2a, the Ark in the original version of the story functions purely as a *war palladium*, not meriting any exceptional focus in the narrative: The palladium is lost, without consideration of its possible return. In a strict sense, the story in its original shape should not be labeled as an “Ark Narrative.”

This original story (1 Sam 4:1b–6a.9–21) has no knowledge of Eli’s sons being guilty of anything in particular, despite this being a regular assumption in research due to the allegedly close references to 1 Sam 2:12–17.22–25.27–36; 3:11–14 within the context of 1 Sam 1–3.⁴³ The critique of Eli’s sons in 1 Sam 2:11–17.22–25 (or 26) was only added through a deuteronomistic revision of 1 Sam 2;3*.⁴⁴ A later addition of the Elides’ destiny in 1 Sam 2*; 3*; 4* to the Ark Narrative, namely under a deuteronomistic redaction (reducing the earliest material to approximately 1 Sam 4:1b–4a.5–11a), is less likely given the dense entanglement of the fates of the Ark and the Elides mentioned above.

3.2 *The Journey of the Ark through Enemy Territory (1 Sam 5:1–7:1.2a)*

The narrative perspective shifts in 1 Sam 5:1–7:2b: No longer do Israel and its woes stand at the center of attention, but rather only the fate of the Ark in hostile Philistine territory. The mention of Ashdod in 1 Sam 5:1 indicates the focal point of the plot to follow. Though the Philistines brought the Ark of the God of Israel under their control (cf. 1 Sam 4:11a), they still have no power over it. In the first episode, the Ark is taken to Ashdod and displayed in the temple of its god, Dagon (1 Sam 5:2),⁴⁵ with this custom typically demonstrating superiority over their powerless enemy. Yet in 1 Sam 5, the opposite takes place. The Ark mysteriously destroys the statue of Dagon (v. 3–5.7b) and brings sickness and doom upon the Philistines (v. 6–7a). The Ark is subsequently sent to Gath (1 Sam 5:9; cf. v. 8) and from there on to Ekron (1 Sam 5:10–12). At every stop, it wreaks great havoc upon the Philistines. Its transfer to Ashkelon and Gaza is only

⁴³ Cf. EYNIKEL 2000:88–106; the intertextual connections are particularly striking in FOKKELMAN 1993:241–244 *passim*.

⁴⁴ As per DIETRICH 2011:211–215; seeing 1 Sam 2:11–18.22–26 as deuteronomistic has become common and is well-founded (cf. e.g., MÜLLER 2008), but typically the Elide passages in 1 Sam 4* are also seen as part of this redaction (cf. e.g., STOEBE 1973:111–115; see EYNIKEL 2000 for the discussion of the literature and arguments).

⁴⁵ On the cult of Dagon as well as Philistine religion in general, see EHRlich 2007:254–271 (on Dagon pp. 256–257). A Temple to Dagon in Ashdod is first mentioned in 1 Macc 10:83–84; 11:4, presumably torn down by Jonathan the Hasmonean.

mentioned on the side, though similar disasters come with it.⁴⁶ The narrative seeks to give the impression that the entire Philistine Pentapolis was ultimately forced to submit to the power of the Ark, and thus, the power of YHWH.

Eventually, the cities' five princes consult religious specialists for advice (1 Sam 6:2), who suggest preparing a guilt offering, putting the Ark on a cart yoked with two cows, and then sending it off (1 Sam 6:2–11, cf. 2 Sam 6:3). The Ark is then escorted upon the cart away from the Philistines and to the *border* with Beth-Shemesh (1 Sam 6:12.16). Beth-Shemesh is situated 20km southwest of Jerusalem in the north-eastern Shephelah – territory long contested between the Philistines and the Judeans.⁴⁷ Yet the specific mention of the Philistine princes *not* crossing the border with Beth-Shemesh (v. 16: (וְנִמְשָׁה סְרַנֵי-פְּלִשְׁתִּים רָאוּ וַיִּשְׁבוּ עֲקָרוֹן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) establishes that (at least in the world of the narrative) the Ark's entrance into Beth-Shemesh constitutes its return to "Israelite," and more specifically: to *Judahite* territory.

Even still, this does not appear to be the proper place for the Ark (1 Sam 6:12–20), and so the Ark is ultimately brought to Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam 6:20–21).

1 Sam 7:1:

וַיָּבֹאוּ אַנְשֵׁי קִרְיַת יַעֲרִים
וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת-אֲרוֹן יְהוָה
וַיָּבֹאוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-בַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב בְּגִבְעָה
וְאֶת-אֶלְעָזָר בְּנוֹ קִדְשֵׁי לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-אֲרוֹן יְהוָה:

And the men of Kiriath-Jearim came
and retrieved the ark of YHWH
and brought it into the house of Abinadab, on the hill,
and they consecrated Eleazar, his son, to hold watch over the ark of YHWH.

The village of Kiriath-Jearim lays on the western border of Benjamin (Josh 15:9; 18:14.15), with the city belonging either to Judah (Josh 15:9; 18:14) or to Benjamin (Josh 18:28; albeit text-critically unclear).⁴⁸ It is possible that this border town even

⁴⁶ This is indicated not only by the number of the five Philistine princes mentioned across 1 Sam 6 (סְרַנֵי; 1 Sam 6:4.16) who are then addressing the problems of the sickness and death caused by the Ark, but also the listing of the five cities of the Pentapolis – Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron – in 1 Sam 6:17. The Pentapolis is symbolically represented in 1 Sam 6:4 with the guilt offering through the five boils and five mice that were demanded: וְנִמְשָׁה עֲקָבְרֵי נֶהָב כִּי- מִסְפַּר סְרַנֵי פְּלִשְׁתִּים חֲמִשָּׁה עֲפָלֵי נֶהָב וְחֲמִשָּׁה עֲקָבְרֵי נֶהָב כִּי- מִסְפַּר אֶחָד לְכֶלֶם וּלְסִרְיָנִיכִם (cf. also vv. 5.17). On the diverse problems of textual transmission in the two verses and their reference texts, see BODNER 2008:634–349. In the MT, "mice" (עַכְבָּרִים) are spoken of first in 1 Sam 6:4; in Ashdod, there is only talk of "boils"/"ulcers" (עַפְלִים, 1 Sam 5:6; also 1 Sam 6:4 MT). The LXX already reads "mice" (μύες) in this verse.

⁴⁷ Cf. FANTALKIN 2004:245–261. According to 1 Kgs 4:9; Josh 15:10; 21:16, Beth-Shemesh was a Judean/Israelite settlement. The material culture features Philistine pottery; yet one must be careful about drawing a direct conclusion about a Philistine population at Beth-Shemesh (as in STOLZ 1980:49, who speaks of a "Philistine settlement in the border country against Judah"; more critical but with comparable tendencies DIETRICH 2011:264–265, with Beth-Shemesh being "Philistine according to the material culture", p. 264, derived from pottery alone). After all, pottery (esp. the carefully-made Philistine bichrome pottery) was a commodity.

⁴⁸ See VIEWEGER 2019:210–211; KOCH 2017:344; and MCKINNY et al. 2018:30–49, also for the discussion on the biblical evidence in light of the archaeological findings and historical-topographical

changed its territorial affiliation over time. Yet, according to the biblical evidence, Kiriath-Jearim is to be understood chiefly as a *Judean* settlement, not as (per Finkelstein/Römer) *clearly Israelite*. The narrative corpus concludes with notice of the Ark's transfer to Kiriath-Jearim in 1 Sam 7:1, and the Ark plays no role whatsoever in the following Samuel/Saul story and only reappears in 2 Sam 6:1.

Several characteristics cause the narrative complex of 1 Sam 5:1–7:1 to function as a large, self-contained unity. The following all serve as overarching narrative brackets: the mention of the five rulers of Philistine territory (1 Sam 5:8.11; 6:4.12.16.18); the hand of YHWH, lying heavy upon the Philistines (יָד־יְהוָה; 1 Sam 5:6.7.9.11; 6:9; cf. 1 Sam 6:3.5); the boils (עֲפָלִים) that first befall the Philistines and then are replicated by them (1 Sam 5:6.9.12; 6:4.5); the dangerousness of the Ark, unfolding wherever it goes. Additionally, numerous references to Exodus are recognizable throughout the section and likewise serve as a linking mechanism in the narrative;⁴⁹ for example, the language of the “hand of YHWH” in 1 Sam 5:6; 6:5 // Exod 9:3; the “plagues” and “cries” of the populace in 1 Sam 5:10.12 // Exod 10:5–6.12.15; 11:6; 12:30; and 1 Sam 6:2.8 // Exod 7:11; 10:7 (advice from the religious specialists during an emergency); 1 Sam 6:8* // Exod 8:11.28; 9:7.34 (the stubbornness motif); finally 1 Sam 6:14 // Exod 10:25 (burnt offering for YHWH via the enemy). These are often interpreted as a late, redactional connection of the Ark and exodus narratives. Ahlström understood the Exodus references to be secondary supplements, seeing Israel's exodus (and deliverance from Egypt) as an allegory of the Babylonian Exile.⁵⁰ Yet this is not necessary; they could have belonged to the original narrative, which, interplaying with 1 Sam 5:11, resulted in the exodus allusions in 1 Sam 4:6b–8. The “Exodus” flavor therefore strengthens the entire state of affairs: the Ark is in “war captivity” all on its own in hostile territory – and here, as there, one is completely dependent upon the help of God for salvation.

The narrative arc even follows a certain storytelling dynamic by increasing the intensity of the suffering, which further strengthens the impression of the unity of 1 Sam 5:1–7:1: The “very great terror” (מְהוּמָה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד; 5:9) upon the people of Ashdod thanks to the “hand of YHWH” becomes a “deathly terror” (מְהוּמָת־מָוֶת; v. 11) in the final Philistine city of Ekron.⁵¹ Accordingly, in the first city of Ashdod, the population “only” falls ill with boils (1 Sam 5:6), while in Gath and Ekron, the presence of the Ark leads to widespread deaths (1 Sam 5:10.11.12; cf. also the deaths in Beth-Shemesh in 1 Sam 6:19).

It is relatively clear that the original Ark narrative 1 Sam 5:1–7:1* originally ended with 1 Sam 7:1. Vers 2a and its report of the 20-year stay of the Ark in Kiriath-Jearim is clearly secondary, a redactional link, that introduces the subsequent ch. 7*,

and territorial-political possibilities.

⁴⁹ The references to Exodus in the Ark Narrative are observed regularly, see e.g., the compilation of references in DIETRICH 2011:217–219; DIEBNER 1989/90:81–92, esp. 88–90; also, RÖMER 2019:104–106.

⁵⁰ AHLSTRÖM 1984:141–149, with a similar interpretation of the exodus motif to SMELIK 1989:128–144.

⁵¹ Interestingly, the LXX does not follow this shift, with no equivalent to the MT מָוֶת “deathly terror” in 1 Sam 5:11.

a deuteronomistic addition that segues back into the Samuel story and the formation of the monarchy in 1 Sam 8–12*; it is also not a part of the original Ark Narrative. The contextualization of 1 Sam 5:1–7:1 with the original “catastrophe narrative” 1 Sam 4* is much tighter, which becomes clear not only from the redactional layer of Exodus-allusion in 1 Sam 4:1–7:1* as shown above. There is also to mention the literary transition from 1 Sam 4:21.22 to 1 Sam 5:1: In contrast to 1 Sam 4 and its focus on Israel and the Elides, 1 Sam 5:1 introduces a new narrative movement by relating the events surrounding the Ark in Philistia. This shift in focus is already prepared in 1 Sam 4:22a:

v. 22:

נתאמר
גלה כבוד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי נִלְקַח אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים

And she said:

“The glory has been taken away from Israel,
for the Ark of God has been taken.”

As opposed to v. 21 of the original ending of the narrative, where the *birth of Ichabod* closes the narrative, v. 22 returns attention to the Ark: the mention of the אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים concludes the previous episode and, beginning in 1 Sam 5:1, the audience embarks on a journey with the deported Ark through hostile territory. V. 22 is therefore clear redactional in nature. Additionally, 1 Sam 5:1 prepares for the geographical transition, taking up Ebenezer as the central location from 1 Sam 4 and, with the keyword “to take away” (לִקַּח), one of the central concepts of the “catastrophe narrative” (1 Sam 4:11.17.19.21.22). It can be concluded that 1 Sam 5:1–7:1 is best understood as a *Fortschreibung* of the original narrative in 1 Sam 4:1b–6a.9–21, resulting in the actual “first edition” of the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4:1–7:1*.

Was 1 Sam 7:1 the original ending of this early Ark narrative? Contrary to the current majority opinion, I find it unlikely that the Ark Narrative ended with its stationing at Kiriath-Jearim and served as an etiology to legitimate a presumed (Ark) sanctuary there (as per Finkelstein, Römer, Schäfer-Lichtenberger, Miller/Roberts, and others; see section 2). The text’s geographic perspective starting from Beth-Shemesh is already *Judean*; 1 Sam 7:1 does not suitably lend itself towards any special power of legitimation; the “bringing” of the Ark (Hiph., בּוֹא) to Kiriath-Jearim is not qualified any differently than its previous stops.⁵² The legitimator character is fleshed out only in 2 Sam 6, a chapter composed following ancient Near Eastern prototypes, as Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger has recently been able to demonstrate as plausible.⁵³

Therefore, the older basic premise that 1 Sam 4–6* and 2 Sam 6* originally belonged together is, in my opinion, undeniable, and can be even more clearly demonstrated in

⁵² The consecration (שָׁדַק) of Eliazar as priest for the Ark is an important aspect of demonstrating that the Ark has now definitely reached home territory. In any case, a sanctuary is mentioned just as little as a place where the Ark is set up – this only happens in 2 Sam 6.

⁵³ For the royal ideology in 2 Sam 6 and its elements from ancient Near Eastern typology, see SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 1993:197*–211*; 2003:323–338; for the ancient Near Eastern parallels, cf. MILLER/ROBERTS 1977:77–86 (with the difference that these scholars take 2 Sam 6 to be independent from 1 Sam 4–6*).

the following. Against Rost it is evident, that 2 Sam 6 does not connect seamlessly to 1 Sam 7:1, as the immediate differences are too great (especially the mention of Baale-judah instead of Kiriath-Jearim in 2 Sam 6:2, as well as the lack of the introduction of David in 1 Sam 6ff.); yet, it can be assumed that with 2 Sam 6*, we have preserved at least the *original ending* reach of an original Ark narrative that began with 1 Sam 4:1–7:1. The familiar lexical connections (such as the “cart” for the transportation of the Ark in 2 Sam 6:3 // 1 Sam 6:7, as well as the epithet “one enthroned upon the cherubim” in 1 Sam 4:4⁵⁴ // 2 Sam 6:2: *יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִים*)⁵⁵ further reinforce the impression of an originally-unified Ark Narrative in 1 & 2 Samuel. These well-known observations may be supplemented by the narrative brackets containing the “godnapping” motif recognizable and whose references within the narrative are described below.

4. “Godnapping” in the Ancient Near Eastern World

As has been regularly noted in the field since at least the 1977 study by Patrick Miller and Jack Roberts,⁵⁶ there are certain ancient Near Eastern parallels and patterns that appear to be reflected in the Ark Narrative. One is the custom of placing spoils of war, and especially cultic implements, on display in the temple of the victorious nation’s deity. The Mesha Stele tells of the Moabite king Mesha triumphing over various Israelite settlements, and in one place (ll. 10–14) of capturing cultic implements from the local sanctuaries to bring “before Chemosh,” the primary Moabite deity.⁵⁷ Examples from the biblical context include the exhibition of Saul’s armor in the Philistine temple to Astarte after his death (2 Sam 31:10), as well as the presentation of Goliath’s sword in the YHWH-sanctuary in Nob (1 Sam 21:10). As mentioned above, 2 Sam 6 is often seen as reflecting a literary genre titled “the return of cultic objects” that is particularly well-attested in Assyrian texts (Miller/Roberts).

However, the evidence raised by Miller/Roberts spans a period of time from the second to the first millennium, encompassing a dangerous geographic scope across diverse Mesopotamian locales and their neighboring regions. In my opinion, this is critically disadvantageous for the argument, since methodological reliability would require that *such sources, functionally and temporally* related either to the southern Levant or to Israel or Judah, were available for consultation as reference texts by the authors, redactors, or recipients of the biblical texts and thus (and least potentially) belonged to the

⁵⁴ As shown, the epithet was not yet part of the catastrophe narrative of 1 Sam 4*, but was rather inserted into 1 Sam 4 when incorporating the Ark narrative from 1 Sam 5:1ff., in order to enable the connection to 2 Sam 6.

⁵⁵ The functional and terminological connections have long been known and brought about Rost’s hypothesis of an Ark Narrative comprising 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6. The references in 2 Sam 6 to 1 Sam 4–6 can be found in DIETRICH 2019:560–562.

⁵⁶ Cf. MILLER/ROBERTS 1977.

⁵⁷ Text of the Mesha Inscription in WEIPPERT 2010:246. Further evidence in MILLER/ROBERTS 1977:17–26.

lived reality of the scribes and the recipients of the texts.⁵⁸ Indeed, these sorts of sources exist – making it worthwhile to turn to a different, though functionally related, custom.

The practice of victorious nations removing statues of gods from the sanctuaries of defeated nations is well attested, though these are rarely destroyed and are much more often brought back to the victors' own sanctuaries. In Mesopotamian history, this custom is attested from the reign of Shu-Ilishu (1984–1975 BCE) down to Cyrus the Great (559–530 BCE), and has been known to Assyriology since the middle of the nineteenth century: the first visual representation of the practice came via Austen Henry Layard's 1848/49 publication of the iconographic collection from Nineveh.⁵⁹ In the following year, Henry Rawlinson's decipherment of the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (BM 118885) provided literary attestation across three different places on the obelisk.⁶⁰ In his 1997 study, Alasdair Livingstone termed this under the neologism “godnapping,” which has since found widespread acceptance in the field.⁶¹ Several studies have been dedicated to studying the practice in depth, plotting its function on a religio-political coordinate system of imperialism, political control, and the demoralization of the subjected population.

After all, statues of gods were seen as *powerful manifestations* of their represented deities;⁶² this explains not only why the statues were not immediately destroyed by the victors,⁶³ but also why they could be consciously used as a tool for religio-political ends. In its literary attestations, the abduction of the god statues is often included in the lists of prisoners (among the kings and royal families) and spoils of war, likely in order to “[minimize] the cult image's prominence and status as divine manifestation.”⁶⁴ Important contributions in this context are connected with the names Mortan Cogan (1974), Kathryn F. Kravitz (1999), Angelika Berlejung (1998; 2012), Steven Winford Holloway (2002), Erika Johnson (2011), and recently Shana Zaia (2015).

An article by Mathias Delcor has already suggested the possibility of the practice being present in the background of the Ark Narrative (esp. 1 Sam 5).⁶⁵ However, he (as well as those who accepted his assertions) proceeded from a rather vague cultural background, since god deportation appears to have been quite a *widespread custom* in antiquity.⁶⁶ Walter Dietrich may also serve as an example of this idea: “In antiquity,

⁵⁸ These methodological presuppositions were analogously formulated in the 1990s by Keel and Uehlinger with their iconographic work in view, and are useful in this case; see KEEL/UEHLINGER 1997:59–64; UEHLINGER 1994:57–89, esp. 59–64.

⁵⁹ LAYARD 1848/49.

⁶⁰ RAWLINSON 1850:33.41.43.

⁶¹ LIVINGSTONE 1997:156–177.

⁶² Cf. BERLEJUNG 1998.

⁶³ There are only a few known exceptions to this, and only two from Assyrian contexts (under Assurbanipal and Esarhaddon) that expressly undertake a destruction of cult statuary; see ZAIA 2015:37–48 (with literature).

⁶⁴ ZAIA 2015:29; see also BERLEJUNG 2012:129–152.

⁶⁵ Cf. DELCOR 1964:136–154.

⁶⁶ Walter Dietrich may also serve as an example of this idea: “In antiquity, after winning a battle, significant pieces of the spoils were often displayed in the temples of their own deities.”

after winning a battle, significant pieces of the spoils were often displayed in the temples of their own deities.”⁶⁷ Yet the study did not proceed beyond these observations.

It has since become clear that the majority of the evidence for this practice stems from Assyrian sources, especially from the Neo-Assyrian Empire.⁶⁸ A total of 56 epigraphic and iconographic attestations of the practice relating to Assyrian rulers are presently known, coming primarily through Assyrian royal inscriptions and occasionally royal correspondences, chronicles, or palace reliefs.⁶⁹ Evidence for the practice frequently emerges from the “Great Kings” of the eighth and seventh centuries: seven attestations from Tiglath-Pileser III, four from Sargon II, ten from Sennacherib, five⁷⁰ from Esarhaddon, and four from Assurbanipal.

This includes evidence *for the first time* concerning the southern Levant, and Samaria particular. The Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions from the second half of the eighth century attest to a common practice of godnapping, with the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod specifically finding mention.⁷¹ Regarding capital of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria, that was conquered in 722 or 720 BCE, the *Summary Inscription* of the Nimrud Prism reports the following:

Nimrud Prism 4:31–33:

²⁵[The inhabitants of Sa]merina [...] ³¹[2]7280 people, together with [their] chariots, ³²and the gods in whom they trusted, as spoil ³³I counted.

The abducted deities of Samaria appear as usual within an enumerative list of the spoils of war. The phrase “in whom they trusted” (*u ilāni tiklīšun*⁷²) is also known from other contexts referring to the Assyrians’ own deities, thus providing information about the respect afforded to the statues as such,⁷³ even when deported as loot. Some scholars such as Manfred Weippert⁷⁴ (referencing Stefan Timm’s objections⁷⁵) consider the mention of the deportation of the deities from Samaria to be a standardizing ideological topos with no historical significance. Yet, the mention of god deportation does not appear in the parallel versions of the conquest of Samaria in the *Annals* (l. 15–16⁷⁶) and the *Great Summary Inscription* (l. 24⁷⁷) from Dur Šarrukin (modern day Khorsabad), thus possibly

⁶⁷ DIETRICH 2011:269.

⁶⁸ See JOHNSON 2011:178. For a current detailed discussion as well as linguistic and historical evaluations of the Neo-Assyrian evidence, see ZAIA 2015:28–54.

⁶⁹ The basic stock of god deportations being found in the compilation in HOLLOWAY 2002:123–144.

⁷⁰ HOLLOWAY 2002 only mentions four attestations, but one more has become known since Holloway’s publication, in which Esarhaddon reports of the deportation of deities from a group of unidentified kings (LEICHTY 2011:iv 78–v 9). Reference to Leichty can be found in ZAIA 2015:28, fn. 32.

⁷¹ See BECKING 1997:162–169; UEHLINGER 1998:739–776; 2002:92–125; KÖCKERT 2009:380–389; LEUENBERGER 2016:290–294.

⁷² On this translation, see BECKING 1997:164–165 (“the gods in whom they trusted”); likewise, UEHLINGER 1998:742–743: “Den Göttern, den sie vertrauten”; WEIPPERT 2010:301 however translates with “den Göttern, ihren Helfern [the gods, their helpers].”

⁷³ BECKING 1997:165.

⁷⁴ WEIPPERT 2010:301.

⁷⁵ TIMM 2004:229–236.

⁷⁶ For the annals, see FUCHS 1994:89–90.

⁷⁷ For the summary inscription, see FUCHS 1994:197; and WEIPPERT 2010:302.

vouching for some historical authenticity. This possibility had already in 1954 been considered by Cyril John Gadd, the first publisher of the prism.⁷⁸

Also well-known are *visual representations* of this practice tied to Assyrian activity in the southern Levant, as shown with the wall relief from Nineveh (Room 10, slab 11) ascribed to Sennacherib depicting the deportation of statues from Ashkelon⁷⁹ as well as other Judean cities.⁸⁰ A relief from Tiglath-Pileser III's palace in Nimrud shows the deportation of deities by Assyrian soldiers, which studies have often connected with Tiglath-Pileser's capture of Gaza in 732 BCE.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Angelika Berlejung has recently presented arguments that could speak to an iconographic depiction of a northern Syrian city (like Unki or Arpad) from which Tiglath-Pileser had gods deported.⁸² Christoph Uehlinger has suggested that a relief from Sargon II's palace in Dur Šarrukin (Room 5, slab 4U: upper register) illustrates the conquest of Samaria described in the Nimrud Prism as well as the removal of the god statues.⁸³ The "stereotypical arm position, indicating holding a tray-like object" immediately recognizable in the relief suggests within the context of comparable iconographic depictions that the relief "had originally shown the deportation of a relatively small cult statue from the city depicted in plates 6–8."⁸⁴ Because of the fragmentary nature of the relief, caution is naturally required when weighting the value of this argument, even if the presentation of the geography in Plates 6–8 strongly indicates Samaria as the depicted city (of course, another possibility is the depiction of the conquest of Hamath). Even so, this results in a cohesive picture pointing to the Neo-Assyrians conducting the practice of the cult statuary deportation in the southern Levant during the eighth and seventh centuries.

5. "Godnapping" as the Cultural and Religio-Political Model for the Ark Narrative

These findings satisfy the prerequisites for the possibility of the practice's reception. More references to the described practice are to be found in the Ark Narrative:

(1) The characterization of the Ark in the narrative thinks of YHWH himself as present alongside it. This is not as present in the original "catastrophe narrative" of 1 Sam 4*, in which the Ark essentially acts as a war palladium. However, 1 Sam 4:3b quite

⁷⁸ GADD 1954:181. For positive historical evaluations of this statement, see also BECKING 1997:165; and UEHLINGER 1998:743. LEUENBERGER 2016:289 points out as a reinforcing argument that only six of the approx. one hundred and fifty conquest reports from Sargon II speak of godnapping.

⁷⁹ Illustration in ORNAN 2005:fig. 118.

⁸⁰ Illustration in ORNAN 2005:fig. 119–120.

⁸¹ Cf. UEHLINGER 2002:94–127; 2017:24.

⁸² BERLEJUNG 2012:156–160.

⁸³ UEHLINGER 1998:760.764 (rationale on pp. 744–771).

⁸⁴ UEHLINGER 1998:764.

apparently appears to be insinuating that YHWH is thought to be present upon the Ark and thus in Israel's midst during battle:

1 Sam 4:3b:

נְקִטָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשְׁלַח אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה
וְנִבְאָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ וְיִשְׁעֵנוּ מִכַּף אֲבִיבֵינוּ:

Let us bring the ark of YHWH's covenant here from Shiloh,
So that he may come within our midst and save us from the hand of our enemies.

YHWH is then explicitly and emphatically mentioned as the acting agent within the context of 1 Sam 5:1–7:1: YHWH “smote” the Philistines (כה נכה Hiph.; 1 Sam 5:6.9; 6:19), and YHWH's direct intervention is recounted through the metaphor of the divine hand (יד־יהוה; 1 Sam 5:6.7.9.11; 6:9; cf. 1 Sam 6:3.5). In 1 Sam 5:10 and 1 Sam 6:9, both of which speak of actively-caused misfortune, the same grammatical gender of both ארון and אֱלֹהִים leaves open whether the actor is the Ark or God himself.⁸⁵ As opposed to 1 Sam 4*, the predominant idea here is the way in which YHWH is thought to always be present upon the Ark; that is, it is seen (at least as a representation of the presence of YHWH) as a statue of a deity. Julius Wellhausen had already pointed out that in 1 Sam 5–6, the Ark “is equated with Yahweh himself more blatantly than anywhere else in the O.T.”⁸⁶ For Wellhausen, however, this served as an argument against the connection of 2 Sam 6 to the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam. Nevertheless, the same element is found in 2 Sam 6, where the primary actor is YHWH (and not chiefly the Ark). With the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem, YHWH *himself* comes to reside in Jerusalem. See the following examples: In 2 Sam 6:2.5 the procession of the Ark going to celebrate “before YHWH”; 2 Sam 6:7.8.9.11: YHWH's burning anger; 2 Sam 6:11.12: YHWH, who blesses the house of Obed-edom; 2 Sam 6:17: the burnt offering after the presentation of the Ark “before YHWH.”

(2) The entire *narrative setup* already alludes to its godnapping background, since the (naturally aniconic) statue of the Israelite deity is captured in 1 Sam 4:11 and embarks on a journey through enemy territory – already in 1 Sam 4:21, the nature of this deportation is played upon with the name אֵי־כְבוֹד (“God is gone”; Brueggemann). This is repeated and reinforced in the redactional addition of 1 Sam 4:22 (“The glory has been taken away from Israel” = גְּלוֹתָ כְבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל) in order to develop this theme of abduction narratively in 1 Sam 5:1ff. To put it like Walter Brueggemann, with 1 Sam 5–6 in view: “YHWH is a prisoner of war on exhibit.”⁸⁷ As in the comparable texts from Assyria, even though the Ark is taken as loot, it is handled respectfully and not harmed. With these references to the phenomenon of godnapping, the text plays on the audience's expectations and turns them on their head: the victorious nation does not ultimately triumph over the population of Israel, but rather, the *entire Philistine population* suffers under the strength of the allegedly powerless Israelite deity (1 Sam 5:1–12). The abduction is no longer a demonstration of power by the Philistine lords, but instead results in them needing to return it to its homeland (1 Sam 6:1–11). YHWH is not deprived of his

⁸⁵ On these observations, see also DIETRICH 2011:259.

⁸⁶ WELLHAUSEN 1899:238.

⁸⁷ BRUEGGEMANN 2002:26.

power, which is normally a critical aspect of the godnapping practice, but rather is powerful even without his own people. The Ark even makes its way back to its people on its own (1 Sam 6:12–7:1).

(3) In the context of these references, the episode in the Dagon temple is striking (1 Sam 5:3–5.7b). Here the defeat of the Philistine god opposite YHWH is reported, in which his statue first falls over “on his face” (דָּגוֹן נָפַל לְפָנָיו אֲרֻצָּה), performing proskynesis before YHWH as the deity represented by the Ark, and is then ultimately destroyed (v. 4); the word combination אֲרֻצָּה and נָפַל in a comparable hierarchical context is only found in Josh 7:6, where Joshua is kneeling before the Ark. The episode in the Dagon temple told with a good dose of irony throughout,⁸⁸ reversing the symbolic power of victory and defeat. Yet the episode itself is evidence of another and particularly *later* traditio-historical perspective of the idol/god image polemic, which can already be understood as monotheistic. This is to a certain degree reminiscent of the god-image polemic in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40:19–20; 42:17; 44:9–20; 46:1–2; 48:3–5). An immediate literary dependence upon Isaiah, as argued by Wolfgang Zwickel,⁸⁹ cannot be proven; and considering the lack of any direct literary references a direct interdependence between Sam and Deutero-Isaiah also less likely – rather, both polemical schemes originate from a comparable intellectual milieu in the post-exilic period. Be this as it may, the original Ark Narrative is not (primarily) interested in a divine conflict between the main Philistine and Israelite deities; this is also true for the Neo-Assyrian practice of godnapping, which the Ark Narrative is reflecting on. The deportation of the respective god statue(s) serves to demoralize the defeated and subjected *nation* – destruction of the statues by the Assyrians only is attested in only a few exceptional cases.⁹⁰ Additionally, 1 Sam 5 only speaks of the *population* of Philistia (and not their god[s]) as being affected by the “blows” of the Ark:

v. 6: וַתִּכְבַּד יְדֵי־יְהוָה אֶל־הָאֲשְׁדּוּדִים

The hand of YHWH was heavy upon the inhabitants of Ashdod [...].

v. 9a: וַיְהִי אַתְּרֵי הַסִּבּוּ אֹתוֹ
וַתְּהִי יְדֵי־יְהוָה בְּעִיר מְהוּמָה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד

And after they brought it [i.e., the Ark] [there⁹¹], the hand of YHWH caused a very great panic in the city [...].

⁸⁸ STOLZ 1980:45.

⁸⁹ ZWICKEL 1994:238.

⁹⁰ From these very few known exceptions, only two stem from Assyrian contexts (under Assurnipal and Esarhaddon) (ZAIA 2015:37–48).

⁹¹ Specifically, the city of Gath (cf. 1 Sam 5:8b); 4QSam^a clarifies here with the addition “Gath” (גַּת), cf. DIETRICH 2011:255.

v. 10: וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים עֶקְרוֹן וַיְהִי כִּבּוֹא אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים עֶקְרוֹן וַיִּזְעַקוּ הָעֶקְרוֹנִים לֵאמֹר הֲסָבוּ אֵלַי אֶת־אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַמִּיתַנִּי וְאֶת־עַמִּי:

And they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And as the ark of God came to Ekron, the inhabitants of Ekron cried out, saying “They have sent the ark of the god of Israel to me,⁹² to kill me and my people.”

v. 11b: שְׁלַח אֶת־אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־יָמִית אֹתִי וְאֶת־עַמִּי כִּי־הִיָּתָה מְהוֹמָת־מְנֹת בְּכָל־הָעִיר כִּבְדָּה מְאֹד יָד הָאֱלֹהִים שָׁם:

“Send the ark of the god of Israel away, so that it returns to its place and does not kill me and my⁹³ people.”

And there was a deathly panic across the whole city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

The Dagon episode with its monotheistic and iconoclastic tendency is thus secondary in character. This appears also plausible from a literary-critical perspective, as the relevant verses in 5:3–5.7b are not well integrated into their context and may easily be removed without disrupting narrative coherence.⁹⁴

(4) The depicted *inversion of the godnapping concept* in 1 Sam 4–6 is played out in 2 Sam 6: the Ark does not only return to its homeland, but is also brought to its resting place in a way that is almost liturgical: Admittedly, the first attempt at transferring the Ark goes awry (2 Sam 6:4–11), and David “was afraid before YHWH” (וַיִּירָא דָּוִד אֶת־יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) (2 Sam 6:9, cf. the fear of the Philistines before the Ark, and through it, the god of Israel: 1 Sam 4:7; 5:7; 6:13; root ירא/Q). However, David assumes leadership of the procession in the second attempt, acting as the leader of the cultic/religious dancing (2 Sam 6:12.13.14.16b). As soon as the Ark reaches its proper location, he takes over the priestly role by presenting the burnt offering in v. 17 (cf. v. 13b) and bestowing the blessing upon the people who are present in v. 18. The Michal episode in 2 Sam 6:20–23 is secondary in this context and transitions already to the dynastic question (with the issue of childlessness in v. 23) from 2 Sam 7.⁹⁵ The Ark Narrative thus concludes with the Ark’s installation in Jerusalem by king David.

This setting conforms in its details with the thought world of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology⁹⁶ (Miller/Roberts and Schäfer-Lichtenberger), especially with the consecration of sanctuaries and royal palaces attested in Neo-Assyrian texts, where the placement of cult statues in the new royal capital plays a critical role (Miller/Roberts). The closest parallels can be found with the inauguration of new capital cities in the Neo-

⁹² The first-person singular in אֵלַי as well as the first-person singular suffix in the subsequent לְהַמִּיתַנִּי וְאֶת־עַמִּי in the MT should be taken as collective singular. The LXX corrects all these forms with the plural, as also previously offered by the MT (v. 10a).

⁹³ As in v. 10, the collective singular is used. The LXX again corrects this to the first-person plural: καὶ οὐ μὴ θανατώσῃ ἡμᾶς καὶ τὸν λαὸν ἡμῶν.

⁹⁴ Cf. also PORZIG 2009:143: The episode does not belong “to the traditio-historical bedrock of the narrative”; see also SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER 2003:328, fn. 25.

⁹⁵ As in DIETRICH 2019:562–564. FISCHER 2003:104–106 even understands the Michal episode as a late-postexilic addition via a reflection of priestly terminology; this is received positively by PORZIG 2009:62.

⁹⁶ On Judean royal ideology in its ancient Near Eastern context, see now also SALO 2017.

Assyrian period.⁹⁷ For one such ceremony, Sargon II (722–705 BCE) invited Ashur and the other main gods to attend the inauguration of his residence in Dur Šarrukin/Khorsabad. He paid them tribute with offerings, followed by a banquet with music. Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) commemorated Nineveh’s dedication as the capital similarly,⁹⁸ and Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE) celebrated the construction of his new palace in Nineveh likewise with processions, offerings, and feasts.⁹⁹ These instances accord both temporally and functionally with the Neo-Assyrian practice of god deportation in the southern Levant, also situated in this period.

2 Sam 6 ultimately illustrates the reversal of god deportation through the return of the Israelite cult statue. Subsequently, the “godnapping” is turned on its head: YHWH’s ark is not deported, but comes to stand at its place, מקום, in Jerusalem, to which 2 Sam 6:17 adheres in taking up the destination of the Ark (“to its place,” למקומו). In the form of the Ark, YHWH cultically “takes possession” of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁰ The formerly-deported Ark has once again been entrusted to priestly care, this time in the hands of David. This closes the narrative circle that began with the Ark going missing from its priesthood (the Elides) in 1 Sam 4.

It is possible that this reference to the location of the Ark “inside the tent” and “in its place” (v. 17) should be understood as already anticipating its actual *maqom*, the Jerusalem temple. At any rate, the ark is “brought to its place” in the temple (בָּאוּ הַכְּהֹנִים אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ (אָרוֹן בְּרִית־יְיָהוָה אֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ) in 1 Kgs 8:6 using the same formulation as in 2 Sam 6:17. The divine epithet “one enthroned upon the cherubim” in 1 Sam 4:4 // 2 Sam 6:2, here serving no purpose, may also be pointing ahead to the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰¹ The Ark is moved there in 1 Kgs 8:6b, “beneath the wings of the cherubim” (אֶל־תַּחַת כַּנְּפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים). Bernd J. Diebner is even considering whether the designation of the Ark’s place as “in the tent” (בְּתוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל; 2 Sam 6:17), which he sees as an allusion to the tabernacle, may already be prefiguring the Jerusalem temple.¹⁰²

(5) Finally, a reference to the deportation of god-images in 2 Sam 5 is particularly remarkable since 2 Sam 5 is typically understood as the ending of the so-called “History of David’s Rise” (1 Sam 16–2 Sam 5), which is not considered part of the Ark Narrative. It is reported within the context of the David’s military conflicts with the Philistines that David ultimately vanquished every enemy of Israel (2 Sam 5:17–25). Yet after the defeat of the Philistines, the following happens:

2 Sam 5:21

וַיַּעֲזְבוּ־יָשָׁם אֶת־עֲצֵבֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׂאֵם דָּוִד וְאָנְשָׁיו:

And there they abandoned their idols, but David and his men carried the idols away.

⁹⁷ LUCKENBILL 1927:§ 94.98.101.

⁹⁸ LUCKENBILL 1927:§ 370.403.416.

⁹⁹ LUCKENBILL 1927:§ 699.

¹⁰⁰ AHLSTRÖM 1984:145–146.

¹⁰¹ On this, see RÖMER 2019:102–103; DIETRICH 2019:561–562.

¹⁰² Cf. DIEBNER 1989/90:81–92.

Oftentimes, the only thing noted about the verse is how it was common practice to, per Shimon Bar-Efrat, “bring the gods onto the battlefield, so that they could help the combatants.”¹⁰³ Fritz Stolz sees the “idols” as “sacred field standards,”¹⁰⁴ and Silvia Schroer “larger but transportable god-images.”¹⁰⁵ When seen within the context as proposed in this article, the reference to the practice of godnapping becomes much more significant. The circumstances since 1 Sam 4 have been completely reversed; the spoil of war, “YHWH,” is returning home, and the former victors are now being subjected to their own practice by the king/priest pretender to the throne, David: it is now him that is deporting the gods of the foreign invaders, the Philistines. In this context it is remarkable, that 2 Sam 5:21 employs the disparaging term “idols” (עֲצָבִים). This is striking, as the practice of god-image deportation does not assume the invalidity of the statues or otherwise treat them contemptuously (as also in the wider narrative context of 1 Sam 4:1–7:1). To the contrary, the LXX (τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῶν) as well as the Latin edition L115 (*deos suos*) and 1 Chr 14:12 (אֱת־אֱלֹהֵיהֶם) speak of the deportation of “their gods.” Given the overall theological and ideological context of the Ark Narrative and its cultural-historical background, the LXX and the Latin version represent likely the original reading.¹⁰⁶ The “idols” of the Masoretic Text incorporate (similar to that in 1 Sam 5) the god-image polemic of a later period.

The deportation of Philistine cult statuary in 2 Sam 5:21 thus constitutes a narrative bracket arching back to 1 Sam 4. Within the Books of Samuel, the practice of deportation occurs only here and in 1 Sam 4ff. This corresponds with the fate of the “Philistine threat”: the Philistines were first introduced in 1 Sam 4 within the context of the Ark narrative; their ultimate defeat is accordingly narrated in 2 Sam 5, also within the context of the Ark Narrative, right before its transfer to Jerusalem. A question arises from these observations concerning how these findings relate to the HDR, usually understood as containing 2 Sam 5. Addressing this question in detail would reach far beyond the scope of this article. The references suggest that at least the episode about the David’s war with the Philistines (2 Sam 5:17–25) was part of the original Ark Narrative, especially given that vv. 17–25 is taken up immediately in 2 Sam 6:1: here it is mentioned that David “again assembled all 30,000 chosen men from Israel” (וַיִּסָּף עוֹד דָּוִד אֶת־כָּל־בְּחֹרֵי בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלְפִי) – this time, however, not to go into battle against the Philistines (2 Sam 5:21) but to have the Ark retrieved from Baale-judah. The HDR (insofar as it is still possible to speak of originally-independent sources¹⁰⁷) could have ended with David’s occupation of Jerusalem right before (2 Sam 5:1–16); Rost had already suggested that the ending of the HDR ending may be found in v. 10.¹⁰⁸ It is thus

¹⁰³ BAR-EFRAT 2009:61.

¹⁰⁴ STOLZ 1980:211.

¹⁰⁵ SCHROER 1992:149.

¹⁰⁶ HUTZLI 2010:223–224 also argues for the primacy of the LXX and L115, but from different grounds.

¹⁰⁷ See KRATZ 2000:176 among others for the established objections.

¹⁰⁸ However, Rost contradicts himself: “The narrative threat that reports of David’s rise ends in 2 Sam 5:10,” while also including vv. 13–16 as a subdued conclusion as well as the mention of the battles with the Philistines in vv. 17–25 (both in ROST 1926:125).

a plausible assumption, that the end of the Ark Narrative (2 Sam 5:17–6:19) would have been redactionally attached to it at a later point.

6. Conclusion

The outcomes of this study may be summarized as follows:

- (1) An original, self-contained “catastrophe narrative” (Dietrich) in 1 Sam 4:1b–6a.9–21 constituted the oldest layer of tradition in the narrative, telling of the fate of Israel and the Elides and reported of the loss of the war palladium during a battle. This was then supplemented with 1 Sam 4:22 and 1 Sam 5:1–7:1 (without the later addition of 1 Sam 5:2–5.7b) to the “first edition” of the “Ark Narrative.” This Ark Narrative extended beyond 1 Sam 7:1 (Kiriath-Jearim), and its ending is preserved in 2 Sam 5:17–25; 6:1–19. The Ark Narrative should thus be understood as a *formerly independent source*; otherwise, it is hardly imaginable that Samuel, the primary protagonist in the rest of the immediate narrative context, would not appear here.
- (2) This narrative was subjected to a series of smaller expansions, including possibly the references to the exodus narrative (if these were not already part of the redaction that extended 1 Sam 4* into the first edition of the Ark Narrative in the first place). These expansions almost exclusively relate to its editorial integration into the context of the Samuel/Saul story, as well as the HDR and the Succession Narrative. The polemic against images of gods reflected in 1 Sam 5:3–5.7b and 2 Sam 5:21 MT is certainly the result of a later revision. There is not room in the present essay to discuss how the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6* was incorporated into the Samuel/Saul story, but recent studies have been able to show that the oldest Saul tradition¹⁰⁹ did not yet know of the Philistine threat.¹¹⁰ Even so, scholars such as Hannes Bezzel and Peter Porzig have assumed that 1 Sam 4* (without 1 Sam 5–6*) was added rather quickly into the Saul tradition, and then immediately connected with 1 Sam 9:1ff (due to the trouble with the Philistines mentioned in 1 Sam 9:16).¹¹¹ Bezzel and Porzig have both pointed to the need to introduce the Philistine threat into the Saul tradition via 1 Sam 4*, since the conflict with the Philistines already stands in the background of 1 Sam 9 (cf. also 1 Sam 13*). Nevertheless, 1 Sam 4* introduces the Philistines as antagonists just as suddenly as 1 Sam 9:16 itself or, further on, 1 Sam 13*. To phrase it differently: In 1 Sam 4, the Philistines are afforded no proper introduction whatsoever; the conflict between Israel and the

¹⁰⁹ On this, see BEZZEL 2015.

¹¹⁰ See BEZZEL 2015:233: “The oldest Saul tradition knows of Saul’s successful fight against the Ammonites, but not of an oppression of Israel by the Philistines. However, this does become *the* theme of the expanded Samuel/Saul cycle” (on this also pp. 206–207).

¹¹¹ Cf. BEZZEL 2015:193.231.233; PORZIG 2009:122.153; see also KRATZ 2000:176 (each identifying the core material of 1 Sam 4 differently).

Philistines serves merely as the starting point for the “catastrophe narrative.” Furthermore, why would 1 Sam 4* supplement the earliest Saul tradition with the loss of the Ark (1 Sam 4:21), only for it to not be picked back up elsewhere in the Saul narrative? Even the later redactional addition of 1 Sam 5:1–7:1* lacks any mention of Saul or Samuel, despite their crucial roles in the Saul narrative. These observations can be more plausibly explained through the integration of 1 Sam 4 into the Saul narrative only at a later point in time, once it was already part of the Ark Narrative. This case will require, however, further literary-historical investigation.

- (3) The cultural-historically notable and religio-politically potent practice of the deportation of cult statuary was identified as the motific model that not only guides the original Ark Narrative in a functional and factual-theological sense, but also situates the narrative within a specific timeframe. Godnapping serves as the identification badge of Neo-Assyrian expansionism that reached into perceptual horizon of the southern Levant from the last third of the eighth century BCE and into the seventh century.
- (4) Three observations on the purpose of the Ark Narrative can be made here:
 - a. *The Power of YHWH*: The narrative proves YHWH to be a powerful deity in spite of deportation by his enemies as well as *being without his people* – an idea theologically highly controversial in ancient thought. He autonomously returns back to Israel.
 - b. *Jerusalem as the new cultic center of “Israel” (after 722 and 701 BCE)*: The return of the “god” in the form of the Ark qualifies Jerusalem as the legitimate center for YHWH-worship in Israel. Context-wise, this functions best in the period after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE, reflecting the transfer of the cult from a major sanctuary of the North (Shiloh; 1 Sam 4) to the cultic center of the South (Jerusalem; 2 Sam 6). This “return” of JHWH to Jerusalem is already a reflection of Zion theology, which, following Othmar Keel¹¹² among others¹¹³ is conceivable in principle given the unexpected withdrawal of the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem in 701 BCE. The authors of the first edition of the Ark Narrative are thus most likely to be identified in the court of Hezekiah or Josiah – though since the description of the “god statues” does not yet display any iconoclastic features, the first possibility seems to be the most likely. It also cannot be ruled out in principle that there was also a certain interest during the time of Manasseh to define Judean claims to being the cultic center of “Israel”; though because of the critical, anti-Assyrian slant of the Ark Narrative, the authors are not likely to have come from the pro-Assyrian court of Manasseh, but rather from contemporary anti-Assyrian groups.

¹¹² KEEL 2007.

¹¹³ See SCHMID 2019:359–370 for a differentiation of the history of Zion theology between theology and research.

- c. *Anti-Assyrianism*: The Ark Narrative plainly criticizes Assyrian supremacy. This becomes clear with the inclusion of the godnapping practice as a narrative model, previously identified with Neo-Assyrian expansionism. In this context of the narrative, the Philistines function primarily as *reflections of the Assyrians*. In any case, very little specific information about the Philistines is available in the Ark Narrative, reinforcing the idea of the Philistines as “stand-ins”: In the Ark Narrative (as well as in the Bible in general), the Philistines are part of an alienating, one-sided biblical depiction of Israel and Judah, for whom the Philistines were enemies.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Philistines were *not a culturally-homogenous* group.¹¹⁵ Even the picture of a unified and organized Philistine Pentapolis insinuated by 1 Sam 5–6 is artificial. The cities of the Philistine Pentapolis exhibit differences in the repertoire designated as “Philistine pottery.”¹¹⁶ The so-called “Late Philistine Decorated Ware” of the Iron Age IIA–IIB shows clear local varieties between the ceramics of the inland areas (Ekron, Gath) and coastal areas (Ashdod, Yavne).¹¹⁷ In contrast to the biblical depiction, where the Philistines are typically described as great and powerful enemies of Israel, there actually appear to have been close trade relations between Judeans and the coastal plain, especially in oil and wine.¹¹⁸ During in the Iron Age IIA/IIB, some pottery types found use across both the “Philistine” cities and the Judean Shephelah.¹¹⁹
- d. *Rejecting Philistia’s influence on Judah after 701 BCE*: Nevertheless, the mention of the Philistines in the Ark Narrative is not limited to functioning as a stand-in for Assyria. The text plainly criticizes the Philistines as well, hence the west-east movement in the 1 Sam 5:1–7:1 narrative: It is known that after various uprisings against Assyria towards the close of the eighth century, the Philistines were defeated first by Sargon II, and then ultimately by Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Sennacherib installed rulers loyal to Assyria in each of the cities, thus securing a buffer zone of loyal city-states along the border with Egypt. These Philistine cities later contributed to the military forces supporting the Assyrians that went down into Egypt with Assurbanipal in 667 BCE.¹²⁰ Most importantly, Philistia was allocated large sections of the Judean territory conquered by Sennacherib, including the Shephelah. Even Gath (1 Sam 5:7–8), which was likely under Judean control during the reign of Hezekiah, was returned to Philistia by Sennacherib.¹²¹ After 701 BCE, the Judeans must have

¹¹⁴ On the hostile depiction of the Philistines in biblical literature as well as the complex historical relationship between Philistia, the Shephelah, and Judah, see NIEMANN 2002:70–91; 2013:243–264. For the reflection of the Philistines in the Bible, see the historical-critical outline in EHRlich 1996; as well as the evaluation of the biblical evidence in FINKELSTEIN 2002:131–167.

¹¹⁵ See KILLEBREW 1996:51–92 and VIEWEGER 2019:28–36 for current overviews of “Sea Peoples”/“Philistines” material culture and discussions of the biblical evidence.

¹¹⁶ MOUNTJOY 2010:1–12.

¹¹⁷ BEN-SHLOMO/SHAI/MAEIR 2004:1–35.

¹¹⁸ On the findings from the Iron Age IIB, cf. VIEWEGER 2019:117–123.

¹¹⁹ GITIN 2015:258–259.

¹²⁰ Cf. BEN-SHLOMO 2013:713.715–716 for the historical processes.

¹²¹ LEVIN 2017:232–240; CHADWICK/MAEIR 2018:48–55.

seen the Philistines as opportunists, representatives of Assyria, or at the very least local Assyrian sympathizers. As the Ark Narrative *de facto* exposes, the practice of godnapping as ineffective, Assyria's and Philistia's claims on Judean territory are likewise repudiated. This in turn supports the observation already noted above that the Ark Narrative dates after 701 BCE, but probably not much later than these events.

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