

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT IN JOSHUA: A PROBE INTO THE HISTORY OF A TRADITION

by

GEORGE W. COATS

Lexington Theological Seminary, Lexington, KY 40508

In the priestly source of the Pentateuch, the ark of the covenant is the product of Moses in obedience to God's command, a symbol of God's presence among his people in the wilderness. In Exod 25:10–22, in a speech from the Lord to Moses, God describes in detail the construction of the ark (cf. also Exod 35:12; 37:1–5). Indeed, there is some evidence that the ark functioned as a symbol of God's leadership for his people through the wilderness (Num 10:33).

In the older sources of the Pentateuch, however, the connection between the ark and Moses is not strong. The principal symbol of God's leadership through the wilderness is the pillar of fire and cloud (so, Exod 13:21–22). The principal symbol of Mosaic leadership is the rod of God (*maṭṭēh hāʾēlōhīm*: see Exod 17:9), the staff that becomes a serpent before the Pharaoh, the bronze serpent that brings healing to Moses' people who face the fiery serpents in the wilderness. In the Song of the Ark, Num 10:35, Moses pronounces the ritual formula for the movement of the ark: "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let them that hate you flee before you." The parallel formula in v. 36 marks the end of the movement for the day: "Return, O Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel." The formulas belong to ancient tradition about the movement of the ark. They show the ark in a procession, symbolizing the presence of God with the people.

In v. 35, Moses uses the formula to effect departure from a camp in the wilderness. And in v. 36, he uses the parallel formula to effect rest at a new camp. But the connection between the ark formulas and Moses is secondary.¹ Thus, the question for this probe into the history of the

1. Noth (1972, pp. 205–206): "For weighty reasons, we must call seriously in doubt the relationship between the ark and both Moses and the religion of Sinai." Others defend the Mosaic origin of the ark. See Fretheim (1968, p. 10) and Rowley (1967, p. 54).

tradition can be formulated: Where does the ark of the covenant belong in the history of Israel's early traditions? What function does it perform in Israel's memory of her early history? The question can be sharpened: Given the division of the Pentateuch into structural units, namely the promise to the fathers, the exodus from oppression in Egypt, the guidance and aid for the people in the wilderness, and the gift of the land (Coats, 1983, pp. 13–26), where does the ark belong? In order to make a contribution to this broad question in the history of Israel's early traditions, this essay will probe the ark traditions in the book of Joshua. Moreover, the probe begins from an observation by Boling (1982, p. 160): "The ark is inseparable from the conquest." In what manner is the ark embedded in the conquest theme of traditions? What are the consequences of this observation for understanding the traditions about Moses and Joshua?

I

Joshua 3:1–5:1

The verses in this pericope do not narrate a story. They do not constitute a simple report of an event. This account of Israel's crossing the Jordan depicts a cultic event, the entry of Israel into the land of Canaan effected by execution of a ritual (Wilcoxon, 1968, pp. 43–70). Boling makes the same point: "The language and organization of chaps. 3–6 is [sic] shaped to a great extent by a dramatization, a 'liturgical conquest'. In other words, the ancient historians here used what we would call secondary cultic sources to describe primary historico-theological events" (1982, p. 158). The structure of the pericope comprises a series of speeches, each designed to direct the progress of the event. V. 1 is an itinerary formula that connects the pericope with the last stage of the wilderness theme, Num 25:1. Moreover, the location establishes unity in the larger structure of Joshua by connecting this pericope with Josh 2:1. The point of departure for the ritual event is Shittim, the place of encampment noted in both Num 25:1 and Josh 2:1. The new place of encampment established by this formula is the Jordan. The people are poised for the ritual event. The first speech in the pericope appears in vv. 2–4. The leaders of the people instruct the people about their participation in the ritual. The points of importance for the ark tradition apparent in this speech are: 1) the ark is to be carried by the Levites; and 2) the ark leads the procession, with the people following. Indeed, the speech notes that the people must depend on the ark for leadership. Without it, they would not know the way: ". . . so that you may know

the way (*hadderek*) you shall go.” The remaining parts of the speech specify the position of the ark in the procession. “Do not come near it.”

The next speeches in the series introduce Joshua into the pericope. Joshua first dictates the preparation of the people for the event. “Sanctify yourselves. . . .” And this speech assumes contact between the people and the holy, represented for the people by the ark. Then Joshua institutes the procession. Joshua’s command initiates the event. “Joshua said to the priests: ‘Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on before the people.’” The ritual stipulates that the ark is to be carried by the Levites. To some extent, the ark belongs to the Levites (Deut 10:8; 31:9, 25, 26; 2 Sam 15:24, 25, 29. See also Num 3:31). The tradition history problem emerges just at this point. Is the ark simply a Levitical tradition inserted into the early traditions at convenient places? Or does it have roots beyond the Levitical tradition? Cody, for example, suggests that the picture of the Levites as the carriers of the ark is Deuteronomistic material in Joshua (1969, p. 139). But the critical item in this pericope is that even with the Levitical figures to carry the ark, Joshua initiates the process. The ark moves at the head of the people toward the Jordan, not because the Levites decided that that point of the ritual demanded the move. The ark moves at Joshua’s command.

Moreover, the movement of the ark as the leader of the people leads to a speech from the Lord to Joshua. The movement will exalt Joshua before Israel. The movement of the ark will establish Joshua’s authority before Israel. And that authority is compared directly to the authority Moses held before Israel. It should be noted that the comparison with Moses does not rest on Joshua’s command of the ark. It rests on a more ambiguous statement about God’s presence with Moses. “This day I shall begin to exalt you in the eyes of all of Israel, so that they may know that just as I was with Moses, I shall be with you.” In Exod 3:12–14, God secures Moses’ authority for carrying out the commission to redeem the people from their slavery with a promise for divine presence in the process. In the Joshua text, the power of the comparison rests with the promise for presence: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.”

The next line in the Lord’s speech to Joshua sets out the details for Joshua’s use of the ark to effect the event of the crossing. The ark plus the Levites who carry it become the symbols of Joshua’s exaltation before God. In the same way, the Moses scene introduces a symbol of Mosaic power. Moses responds to the Lord’s promise for presence by a self-abasement: “They will not believe me or listen to my voice . . .” And in order to meet that crisis, the Lord’s speech makes Moses’ rod (*matteḥ*)

a symbol of his power. When Moses throws the rod on the ground, it becomes a serpent (*nāḥāš*). When Joshua directs the Levites to move into the river with the ark, the way in the river opens. The ark functions in the Joshua tradition in a manner that is analogous to the rod for the Moses tradition. Joshua's initiative with the ark matches Moses' initiative with the rod.

But just as the rod in the hands of Moses has a double role to play, the symbol of Moses' exaltation and, as the rod of God, the symbol of God's presence to effect the delivery of the people, so the ark has a double role to play. The Lord's speech to Joshua sets the priests and the ark on the edge of the river. The next speech places the priests with the ark in the river. Joshua then delivers the instructions to the people. The first Joshua speech, v. 9, is a call to attention. The second is an elaborate statement of theology. In the form of a demonstration of evidence leading to a particular conclusion, the "knowledge formula" in v. 10 shows that the ark's crossing the Jordan proves that the "living God" (*ʿel ḥay*) is in the process of giving the land to the people. Indeed, the summary statement defining the enemies to be driven from the land is intended to be inclusive: "The Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites." And again in v. 11, an epithet for the ark points to the inclusive extent of the conquest. "The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the land is passing over the Jordan before you."

The speech then specifies the character of the event. It is an event that will occur when the ritual is properly conducted. There is no battle. There are no swords flashing. The event occurs when the ritual proclaims its word, *ex opere operato*. In v. 12, Joshua tells the people to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, to participate in the procession. When the feet of the priests carrying the ark touch the waters of the Jordan, "then the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters coming down from above. And they shall stand up in one heap (*nēd*)."

Vv. 14–17 then describe the proper execution of the ritual. Again, it is important to note that the narrative does not appear in the form of a story. The report develops no plot. Rather, the narrative in these verses simply reports that the qualifications in the ritual were met. When the priests with the ark touched the water of the Jordan, water that was more extensive than usual since the Jordan was at flood stage, the water stopped. Indeed, it rose in a heap (*nēd-ʿeḥād*). Moreover, v. 17 emphasizes that the people passed over the Jordan *on dry ground* (*beḥārābāh*). The ark remained in the middle of the river on dry ground. And the process facilitated the passage of Israel through the river on dry

ground. The concluding statement highlights the total scope of the event: “. . . until all the nation (*haggôî*) finished passing over (*la^căbôr*) the Jordan.”²

One might conclude just here that the ark belongs to the Levites, its position in the ritual secured by the priestly status of the caretakers. The Levites carry the ark. To some extent, one must recognize the necessary connections between the ark tradition and the Levitical traditions in the book of Joshua. But Joshua manipulates the Levites and the ark as a single instrument. The procession across the Jordan with the Levites carrying the ark belongs to Joshua in the same manner that the rod belongs to Moses. But in this case, the manipulation of the symbol takes on the character of ritual with procession and priests rather than the character of a single act from Israel's lone hero.³

In Joshua 4, the character of the event as ritual emerges with even sharper focus. To mark the occasion, the conclusion of the Jordan crossing, the Lord instructs Joshua to create a place to remember the event. Joshua is to instruct the representatives from the tribes to take twelve stones from the midst of the river and set them up at the place where Israel spends the first night in the land. The stones are not to be selected at random. Rather, they are to come from the place in the midst of the river where the feet of the priests stand. The point is clear: The place where the priests stood is the place in the river where the ark was, the place where Joshua had put the priests. And now Joshua instructs the twelve to bring stones from the river in order to create a sanctuary. The sanctuary would be the place to commemorate entry into the land. The speech in vv. 5–7 defines the character of the sanctuary as a memorial.

But the cultic character of the event returns to center stage with a catechism (Soggin, 1960). In 4:6, the purpose of the stones is defined: “. . . in order that this may be a sign in your midst. When your sons ask on the next day saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you shall say to them: ‘The waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones shall be a memorial for the

2. So Noth (1953, p. 33). Noth argues: “Auf der anderen Seite wäre die Gegenwart der Lade an sich nicht unbedingt notwendig; das Jordanwunder hätte ebenso ohne sie erzählt werden können, wie das in 4 23 mit ihm verglichene Schilfmeerwunder ohne sie erzählt wird.” Yet, this point assumes the dependency of the Jordan tradition on the tradition about crossing the Sea. If the direction of influence is the opposite, the Jordan crossing tradition would show not only its own distinctive shapes but also the distinctive role of the ark. In that light, the parallel between the ark of Joshua and the rod of Moses emerges.

3. For a definition of the Moses narratives as heroic saga, see Coats (1985, pp. 33–44).

Israelites forever’.” V. 8 reports that the instructions for constructing the memorial at the first camp in the land were carried out. V. 9 then notes that Joshua set up the stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the priests stood with the ark while the people passed over. And the etiological formula “to this day” gives authority to some current object in the river. Perhaps two traditions come together there. One would undergird a memorial near the river, perhaps at Gilgal. The other would suggest a memorial in the river. But in any case, the ritual event is memorialized by construction of a specific place. And the catechism secures the memorial in the process of tradition.

The conclusion to the ritual begins in vv. 10b–11: “The people passed over in haste [cf. Exod 12:33]. And when all the people finished passing over, the ark of the Lord and the priests passed over before the people.” Vv. 12–13 incorporate the subthemes about the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Then v. 14 makes the conclusion explicit. With the crossing of the Jordan, Joshua stands exalted in the eyes of Israel. The crossing under the leadership of the ark with the priests (v. 11) establishes the authority of Joshua. And that authority matches the authority of Moses. Vv. 7–8 make that point explicit in anticipation of the event: “The Lord said to Joshua: ‘This day I will begin to exalt you (*gaddelkā*) in the eyes of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you (^ʿ*ehyeh* *ʿimmāk*).” Vv. 15–17 then report the movement of the ark from the river and the return of the waters of the Jordan to their previous position.

The pericope comes to a conclusion with the summary narration in 4:19–5:1. Vv. 19–20 report that the crossing occurred, the date, and the site for the camp on the side of the Jordan in the land now given to Israel by God. The site, Gilgal, is the location for the twelve stones taken from the Jordan and thus the location for celebration of the ritual crossing. Moreover, the catechism is repeated. Vv. 21–22 carry the question/answer scheme and point to the purpose of the celebration. Comparison with the scheme in v. 6 shows one significant point. In v. 6, the meaning of the stones lies in the crossing effected by the ark that cut off the waters. In v. 22, there is no reference to the ark. The response is rather focused on the “dry ground” (*bayyabbāšāh*). And the comparison with the “dry ground” crossing at the Sea is explicit: “just as the Lord your God did at the Sea of Reeds which he dried up before us until we crossed.”

One should note that the noun for “dry ground” here, *yabbāšāh*, is not the same one as the word for “dry ground” in v. 17, *ḥārābāh*. One might suggest that the entry of *yabbāšāh* at a point in the text that

makes an explicit reference to the Sea tradition shows influence on the Jordan crossing narrative from the vocabulary patterns of a complex that is traditio-historically prior. Could one not argue that the Jordan crossing has its own distinctive diction in *ḥārābāh*? The noun, *yabbāšāh*, in the tradition about the Jordan crossing would then suggest shaping here from the Sea tradition. Yet, the Sea tradition uses both nouns to describe the result of the parted waters. In Exod 14:21, the noun is *ḥārābāh*, while in v. 22 the noun is *yabbāšāh*.

It would be helpful at just this point to pursue the comparison with the crossing at the Sea. What precisely is the relationship between the account of the Reed Sea crossing and the account of the Jordan crossing? Noth (1953, p. 33) suggested that the description of the Jordan crossing has been shaped by the description of the Sea crossing. Clearly some kind of parallel exists (so, Ps 114:5). But I have suggested that the narrative about the Jordan crossing is primary (Coats, 1969). The language that describes the Sea crossing derives from the specific diction of the Jordan ritual. The older Sea tradition has nothing about a crossing. Whether the Jordan description is primary or dependent on the Sea tradition, a comparison of the two may nonetheless illustrate the role of the ark in the Joshua story.

In Exod 14, the crossing occurs under pressure. Moses and the Israelites sit in a trap created by the Sea in front and the Egyptians at the rear. In the Joshua text, the pressure is different. No enemy pursues Israel to the brink of the water. But pressure is nonetheless present. Israel sits poised at the boundary of the land. The entire tradition points to entry and possession of the land. But the river represents a natural barrier. The critical question for the people, not only for the people of Joshua, but for the people of each generation who celebrate the event in the ritual crossing, must be: "How do we enter the land?"

For Moses, God's instructions call for use of the instrument that becomes the symbol of Mosaic leadership: "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the people of Israel may go on dry ground (*hayyabbašāh*) through the sea" (Exod 14:15–16). For Joshua, God's instructions call for use of the instrument that becomes the symbol of his leadership. In 3:2, the leaders of the people address their audience with instructions for following the ark as it would be carried by the Levites.⁴ And the specific order for the march is defined

4. Cody (1969, p. 139) suggests that the picture of the Levites as the carriers of the ark is Deuteronomistic material in Joshua.

(v. 3). But the active process itself is controlled by Joshua. Joshua initiates the event as well as the ritual preparation for the event. So, v. 5: "Joshua said to the people: 'Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.'" And v. 6: "Joshua said to the priests: 'Take up the ark of the covenant and pass over before the people.'" The event is still ritualized. And as a part of the ritual, the Levites carry the ark. But in the tradition, the event occurs at Joshua's command.

Moreover, in v. 7, the Lord addresses Joshua: "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel. . . ." And the result places Joshua on the same level with Moses: ". . . that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." God's presence authorizes Moses' leadership in the Exodus (so, Exod 3:12). His presence now authorizes Joshua's leadership in the entry into the land. The result of that authority affirmed by the promise to Joshua for divine presence is a commission to Joshua to command the ark. So, v. 8: "You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant." And the result of Joshua's act appears in v. 17: "While all Israel was passing over on dry ground (*beḥārābāh*), the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord were standing on dry ground (*beḥārābāh*) in the midst of the Jordan." That divine command to effect the crossing by commanding the ark is like the divine command to Moses to effect the crossing of the sea by wielding the rod. In Exod 14:15: "The Lord said to Moses . . . , 'Lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground (*bayyabbāšāh*) through the sea.'" The ark plays no role in the crossing of the sea. The rod plays no role in the crossing of the Jordan. But both instruments function in the same way for their respective traditions, the means by which the hero of the tradition effects the crossing. It would seem to me to be clear, moreover, that in the history of the tradition, the crossing theme belongs to the entry into the land, the leitmotif for the conquest. The verb for crossing, *ʿābar*, is a leitmotif that signifies crossing the Jordan into the land. The basic datum in the tradition would appear to be, therefore, the Jordan crossing with the ark as the symbol of Joshua's (or the Lord's) leadership. And that would have been a ritual to be repeated at Gilgal. If both the sea and the river traditions were celebrated at Gilgal, the primary celebration would have been the river crossing, the entry into the land, the conquest.⁵ And the hero would have been Joshua, the ark of the covenant the symbol of his leadership.

5. So, Noth (1953, p. 33): "Wohl mag die Überlieferung vom Schilfmeerwunder die Entstehung der Erzählung vom Jordanwunder beeinflusst haben." Noth contends that the

The force of this conclusion would be substantiated by the catechetical formula in vv. 22–24.⁶ It is the Jordan crossing that serves as proof that the hand of the Lord is mighty (v. 24). Moreover, 5:1 observes that the Jordan crossing provokes fear for the Canaanite kings. Indeed, the Jordan crossing functions as the evidence for the fear, and the terms for fear are characteristic for conquest traditions: “Their heart melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.”

This exploration of the first pericope in Joshua relevant for a tradition history probe into the ark narratives suggests three statements as a working hypothesis: 1) The ark functions specifically as the symbol of God’s presence in the conquest. It cannot therefore be a Mosaic tradition since the tradition history holds Moses away from conquest stories (Coats, 1976). 2) The ark appears to function in the conquest stories as an object representing God’s presence, effected by a cultic procession. Ritual is central in the display of this object. But the ritual does not necessitate a conclusion that the ark is a late element in the history of the tradition, the result of the ritualizing of the event. It is a primary and necessary part of the Joshua tradition, just as the rod of God is primary and necessary for the Moses tradition. 3) The ark represents not only God’s presence in the procession or the conquest, but also Joshua’s leadership. Just as the rod of God in the Moses traditions represents Mosaic leadership and at the same time is identified as the rod of God, so also the ark of the covenant is both a symbol of Joshua’s leadership and a visible representation of God’s presence in the conquest.

Joshua 6:1–27

The context for the pericope in Joshua 6 is critical. Josh 5:13–15 sets the stage for the tradition about Joshua’s battle with Jericho. The little fragment in these verses also suggests a comparison between Joshua and Moses. V. 13 sets the stage by placing Joshua at Jericho. The battle is imminent. But at this point, Joshua is confronted by a mysterious man with a drawn sword in his hand. The war setting is thus critical and provides a functional context for Joshua 6.

thesis from Kraus (1951, p. 181) runs into problems. Kraus suggested that the crossing event was celebrated annually at Gilgal. That event set the crossing at the sea and the crossing at the river together, celebrated annually at Gilgal. See also Kraus (1965, p. 156) and Albright (1968, p. 45).

6. Soggin (1972, p. 64) notes that two parallel versions of the tradition about the twelve stones appear in this text. One reports that the stones were taken to Gilgal; the other notes that the stones were set up in the river at the point where the priests passed with the ark.

But the fragment continues. Joshua questions the visitor: "Are you for us, or for our enemies?" When the man identifies himself as the commander of the Lord's army, Joshua responds as if to a theophany. He falls on his face and worships. The mysterious man then orders Joshua to remove his shoe since the place for this apparent theophany is holy. Joshua obeys, and the fragment comes to an end.

The comparison with Moses is suggested by the response of the leader when the leader observes the presence of God. In the Moses tradition, Moses the shepherd sees a burning bush. But the bush is not consumed by the fire. The object of the vision, for Moses the burning bush and for Joshua the man with a drawn sword, is only the means for attracting the hero's attention. It is not the central part of the scene. In the Moses story, the narrative continues with God's call to Moses (Exod 3:9–12) and the presentation to Moses of symbols for his authority, for God's presence with him, or for both. Exod 3:14–16 focuses on the name for God as a promise for presence. 3:17–22 carries the promise for possession of the land with the despoiling. 4:1–9 then introduces the signs. Moses' rod will turn into a serpent. And that sign leads to the leprous hand healed by the presence of God. And that sign leads to the water that turns to blood. The principal point, however, is that closely associated with the theophany marked by the call to remove his shoes because the ground was holy is the note about the rod that becomes a serpent. The theophany leads to the symbol that characterizes Mosaic leadership.

The fragment for the Joshua tradition is, however, apparently incomplete. 5:15 reports that the commander of the Lord's army told Joshua to remove his shoe since the place where Joshua was standing was holy ground. Then the last line of the chapter reports that Joshua obeyed the instructions. And with that word, the fragment appears to break off. The scene anticipates something more, some sign that God would be with Joshua, some report that God would give Joshua a sign of his authority. Perhaps the reference to "the Lord's army" in v. 14, *šar-šeba-ʾadōnay*, contains an allusion to the ark.⁷ Is it not possible that the allusion implies that the mysterious man, the captain of the ark of the Lord, ordains Joshua to stand in that position, the captain of the ark of the Lord? But the fragment breaks off. The mark of Joshua's leadership does not appear explicitly in the scene. Instead, Josh 6:1 begins a new story with a syntactical mark that the pericope begins in 6:1. Rather than the consecutive pattern of narrative that would mark continuation

7. Von Rad (1966, p. 123) refers in this conclusion to Kautsch. For an evaluation of the term *ʾarōn*, "ark" in its various combinations, see Seow (1984).

from 5:15, 6:1 is a nominal sentence with participial construction. "Jericho was shut up from within and without because of the Israelites."

Yet, it seems appropriate to suggest that the entire pericope, 6:1–27, describes the sign of Joshua's authority as anticipated by the fragment in 5:13–15. Moreover, the Jericho pericope, 6:1–27, is an ark story. The sign of Joshua's leadership implied by the fragment in 5:13–15 is specifically the ark that facilitates the fall and destruction of Jericho. That point would make explicit the function of the commander of the hosts of the Lord as a reference to the ark, the scene an ordination of Joshua as the commander of the ark in the process of the battle against Jericho. Thus, again it is clear that the ark functions for the Joshua tradition in the same way that the rod functions for the Moses tradition. Moreover, there is no justification here for suggesting that the reference to the commander of the hosts is secondary, a late adaptation for the Joshua tradition. It stands at the heart of the Joshua tradition, just as the rod stands at the heart of the Moses tradition.

The pericope in 6:1–27 sets the ark into the middle of a cultic procession, just as in the Jordan crossing.⁸ Just as the ark marks the entry into the land as a symbol of God's presence with Joshua as the people cross the Jordan in cultic procession, so the ark marks the first major victory of God over the Canaanites on the land, an event effected by cultic procession. The speech first identifies the goal of the ritual. "I have given into your hand Jericho with its king and mighty men of valor." Then the speech spells out the details of the ritual. V. 3 calls for the procession to circle the city once each day for six days. V. 4a specifies the position for the ark, preceded by the rams' horns, for the procession. The seventh day calls for the procession to circle the city seven times. Then, with the mark of the trumpet, the people in the procession conclude the event with a shout. And at that point the city's walls will fall flat. It is important to note that the description of the event defined by these instructions is not a description of military strategy, a plan that

8. Maier (1965) traces the history of the tradition about the ark. The center of the tradition, according to his reconstruction, is the etiology for the stones from the Jordan river. The ark enters the tradition after the Joshua recension places the material at a national level (see the chart; Maier, 1965, p. 29). But the ark accounts for the sacred character of the stones. And the ark focuses the role of God in the victory over Jericho. The excessive complexity of the tradition's history as developed by Maier does not appear to me to be justified. The ark must belong to the same level as the one that accounts for Joshua's role in these events. Perhaps an old local tradition about the ruins around Jericho accounts for the story about the fall of that great city. But I cannot see a stage in the tradition-history without Joshua, the ark, and the procession across the river, around the city.

will permit Joshua to attack the city, to gain entry by breaching the walls with the machinery of war. To the contrary, the instructions call for a cultic event, a ritual that when properly executed will effect the entry (Soggin, 1972, p. 86). It is of no value to ask this text how Joshua really brought the walls down, just as it is of no value to ask a contemporary priest who conducts the ritual how Jesus really died and rose from the tomb or to ask a contemporary rabbi how the Israelites really escaped from Egyptian oppression. In this pericope, the walls of Jericho fall when the ritual is properly executed, *ex opere operato*. And that ritual sets the ark at center stage, the event the result of Joshua's command (so, v. 6).

Vv. 8–14 narrate the events of the procession for the first six days. At the center of the procession are the ark and the priests who blow the rams' horns. And the narrative shows the procession conducted in strict adherence to Joshua's command. "So they did for six days." Vv. 15–21 then describe the conclusion of the event. On the seventh day, the procession circled the city seven times. On the seventh circuit, the rams' horns sounded, the people shouted, and the walls fell flat (v. 20). And the inhabitants fell to the Israelites' swords. Vv. 22–25 account for the exception. Rahab and all of her family survived the event. Indeed, the etiological formula in v. 25 notes the presence of Rahab in Israel "to this day", the result of Rahab's aid to Israel as narrated in Joshua 2. But even this element is subordinated to the ritual character of the tradition. Rahab and her family were set outside the city, the locus for the chaos created by the victory of Joshua and the ark over the enemy.

The cultic character of the procession is enhanced by the sevenfold circuit of the city on the seventh day. The connection between this element and the Sabbath is obvious. Moreover, the rams' horn, the *šōpār*, emphasizes the character of the event as cultic.⁹ Again, it is critical to note that the ark stands at the center of the event. The procession can be understood as an act of praise. The ark is the instrument that reminds the people of God's presence in the event and thus the occasion for praise (so, Ps 132:8). The act of worship occurs under Joshua's direction and, accordingly, stands at the heart of the Joshua tradition.

But there is more. The seven day system undergirding the Sabbath element in the pericope appears in the priestly tradition as a key for

9. Boling (1982, p. 206). The ram's horn was used as a military instrument to rally the troops, to signal a victory. Here the *šōpār* marks the beginning of the battle. But the solemn occasion is clearly not a military scene. It is ritual. This point is confirmed by the use of the *šōpār* in Exod 19:16; 20:18; Ps 81:4; 98:6.

celebrating God as creator of the world. In the Joshua tradition, the seven day circuit of the city sets Jericho under the control of Joshua and the God he represents. It is significant that a major element in the description shows Rahab, the woman who had helped the Israelite spies, set in her proper place by the results of the ritual. Rahab is also the name of the personified Sea, the opposite of created order (Ps 89:10). To be sure, the name of the hostess for the spies is linguistically different from the names of the mythological symbol of the deep. In Isa 51:9 (see also Ps 89:11), the name is *rahab*. In Josh 6:25, the hostess for the spies is *rāhāb*. But the point of connection in the tradition does not depend on linguistic identity. The names are homonyms, and the sound carries the connection for the story. In the same manner, Gen 2:25 reports that the two people in the garden were naked (*‘ārūmmīm*) and yet not embarrassed. Gen 3:1 reports that the serpent was subtle (*‘ārūm*). The two words are not identical. Yet, their function in the story creates a fascinating, if somewhat subtle, word play. A similar word play occurs with the two names Rahab in the river/sea crossing traditions. Rahab is the name of the dragon of the deep, cut in pieces so that the Lord's redeemed might pass over (*la‘ābôr*), an allusion to entry into the land (so, Isa 51:9). Vv. 22–25 report not only that Rahab and her family escape the destruction of the city but that she continues to dwell in the city “to this day”. It cannot be an accident that the event on the seventh day puts Rahab into a place where she continues under the control of the creating God and his people.

If a word play does in fact connect the river crossing—Rahab the hostess traditions with the sea tradition, it would introduce a cosmological dimension into the ark image in Joshua. Indeed, the picture of the ark crossing the water, the Jordan, has a cosmological, perhaps explicitly a creation dimension (Psalm 114). The ark thus carries not only the power of God's presence in the entry, the power of God's presence for war, but also the power of God's creating word. In the ark resides the symbol of God who creates the world and in it a land for Israel's possession.

Thus, the pericope that marks the confirmation of Joshua's call, the beginning of the conquest and thereby the fulfillment of God's promise to give Israel a land, symbolizes with the ark procession the presence of God in the land to create Israel's place. But it also demonstrates the power of the ritual. Creation of the land is effected *ex opere operato*. And the gift of that ritual comes from God through the hand of Joshua.

The creation element in the tradition recalls the connection between the Jordan crossing pericope and the Reed Sea tradition. It has been noted that the crossing element in the sea tradition carries creation

motifs. And an easy conclusion from that observation would be that the sea crossing is in some manner the event that creates Israel as the people of God. But the direction of influence in the history of the tradition is critical. The creation motif rests with the ark/Joshua tradition, not with the rod/Moses tradition. The way through the sea on dry ground reflects an adaptation of the tradition under influence from the Jordan crossing. And it is only in that facet that creation themes appear in the sea tradition. The primary tradition in this complex, described in poetry as a sea/river parallel, is the river crossing, the event that marks the creation of Israel by entry into the land. The point calls for a revision of the assertion that the center of Israel's faith is the exodus. To be sure, the Moses tradition sets the exodus as the center of the faith. And that center is characterized by the formula, "the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt". But the weight of that center in the Pentateuch should not obscure the importance of the confession of faith in the Lord who gives Israel the land (1 Kgs 8:34, 40, 48; 2 Chr 6:25, 31, 38, *et al.*).

Joshua 7:1–26

The principal character of the ark tradition in Joshua is cultic, the ark an instrument representing God's presence in the procession. The specific character of the tradition is defined by the conquest theme. God acts. And in his act, he gives the people the land. The ark is a specific symbol of God who empowers Joshua to lead the conquest and thus to secure the land for Israel. As an instrument to facilitate the worship of the people in celebration of the conquest, the ark is attached to an act of praise.

But praise is not the only act of worship connected with the ark in Joshua. The pericope in 7:1–26 describes Israel's attack on Ai. As in the Jericho pericope, so here the narrative builds initially on a spy report. But in contrast to the spy report in Num 13–14, here the report is positive. Indeed, it is so positive that the spies recommend cutting the invasion force to about three thousand men. The narrator has defined the goal of the report, however, by noting in v. 1 that Achan had taken items from the spoils of Jericho. And because of the desecration, the Israelites lose the battle. V. 6 then describes Joshua's response to the defeat: "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel, and they put dust on their heads." The description of the event is clearly a description of a lament ritual. Indeed, Joshua's prayer, vv. 7–9, follows the classic form of a lament ritual. It begins with the lament particle, *ʾāhāh ʾadōnay*, and continues with a question introduced with *lāmāh*.

The text does not make the point explicit. Yet, one might assume that the ritual for defining the guilty party responsible for desecration of the community and thus the defeat at the hands of the citizens of Ai occurs before the ark, just as Joshua's lament does. Thus, the ark would be not only the place for the praise and lament in the worship of the community, but also the place for administration of community affairs. In this particular case, that means the place for seeking an oracle from God, the place to "inquire of the Lord".

Joshua 8:30–35

Yet another pericope assigns a significant event of worship to a place marked by the ark. Vv. 30–31 in Joshua 8 report simply that Joshua constructed an altar on Mount Ebal in accord with the directions of Moses, preserved in the "Book of the Law of Moses". Moreover, the report describes the event of worship: burnt offerings and peace offerings were offered on the altar. And Joshua inscribed a copy of the law of Moses on stones in the presence of the people. V. 33 places the ark in the ceremony, carried by Levites according to the command of Moses. The ark was positioned between Ebal and Gerizim (v. 33). And with its position established, Joshua read the law in the hearing of the people.

It is interesting to note that in this pericope, movement of the ark by the hands of the Levites comes from the command of Joshua. But Moses dominates the picture. Indeed, the key verse that reports the reading of the law leaves the subject of the verb ambiguous. The context necessitates reading Joshua as the subject. But the sentence itself does not define the subject. Moreover, the ceremony parallels an account of the same event in Deuteronomy 27. In the Deuteronomy text, the ark is under the control of Moses. But that cast in the ark traditions appears to be the peculiar emphasis of the Deuteronomistic Historian. The construction in Joshua 8 that places emphasis on Moses would thus reflect the special interests of the Deuteronomistic Historian. But it would also suggest that behind the Deuteronomistic construction lies the tradition that understands the ark as a Joshua symbol and Joshua as the leader of the people who establishes the ceremony between Ebal and Gerizim.

Moreover, the ceremony described here functions as covenant inauguration, the repetition of the ceremony as a covenant renewal. The location, between Ebal and Gerizim, connects the Joshua, ark, covenant tradition with Shechem. And the consequence is to suggest that the ceremony has moved from Gilgal to a new sacred site. Indeed, the move opens the suggestion that the covenant renewal in Joshua 24 belongs to the same complex of tradition as the one described here. In Josh 24:1, Joshua initiates the gathering. He invites the people gathered to declare

allegiance to the Lord (vv. 14–15). The act establishing the allegiance of the people occurs in response to Joshua's declaration of the sacred tradition, the credo of vv. 2–13. The dialogue between the people and Joshua ends in v. 24 with the renewal of their commitment to obey. And the process concludes in vv. 25–27 with a general statement about the covenant, with statutes and ordinances, at Shechem. Then v. 26 notes that Joshua wrote the words in the book of law and set up a great stone as a witness. But no comment about where the book of law might have been placed appears. The parallel in 8:30–35 connects the reading with a ceremony conducted by the Levitical priests who carried the ark. And the description of the ark in Exod 25:16 suggests that the covenant document is deposited in the ark.

If the ark has such a central place in the covenant ceremony associated with Joshua, however, it is remarkable that it does not appear explicitly in the instructions for the ceremony. That fact is offset, however, by the central role played by the ark in the credo itself. To be sure, the word "ark" (*ʾărôn*) does not appear in the credo. There is, however, a key term in the credo which can be understood most adequately as a metaphor for the ark. Vv. 11–12a recite the Jordan crossing and the attack on Jericho, both an affirmation that God sent "the hornet" before Israel and that it drove the enemy out. V. 12b then affirms that the victory, established by the hornet in v. 12a, did not come by Israel's military power. The positive affirmation is in v. 13. "I gave you a land. . . ." The hornet, *ḥaššir ʿāh*, was the instrument of God's victory.

But what is the hornet? Does it refer to the use of insects in warfare?¹⁰ Or does it refer to the use of a symbol for God himself, simply a literary metaphor? The root *šr*^c can mean to humble, to afflict. The ark is the place of worship where lament occurs, where the people of God humble themselves, prostrate themselves, fall on their faces to the ground before God. Moreover, it is the symbol of God's presence that functions on behalf of his people in warfare (cf. Judg 4:5–9). In the ark narrative, 1 Sam 5:6, the narrator reports that the Lord "terrified and afflicted the Philistines" (*wayešimmēm wayyak*). And the men of Ashdod assign the cause of the affliction to the ark. The word is not hornet here. But the image of "affliction" as an active, aggressive agent associated with the ark enlarges the picture of the ark in the tradition. The "hornet" appears in only two other texts. In Exod 23:28, the Lord announces his intention to drive out the enemy from the land by sending the hornets before

10. Boling (1982, pp. 536–537). Boling concludes that the most probable meaning of the term is to be found in the ancient practice of using insects in warfare. See also Neufeld (1980, pp. 30–57).

Israel. (Is the plural a plural of majesty?) But v. 29 affirms that the victory is the result of the Lord's work. Deut 7:20 casts the word in the same context. The hornets symbolize God's power to effect the conquest. And, I suggest, the metaphor depicts not simply God in general lines, but particularly God resident with the ark. The ark, with the metaphor effective in its representation of the holy war function, marks the presence of God with his holy army. God sends his hornet. And it drives the enemy away. The exegete errs if the metaphor remains a literal reference to insects. The hornet functions in the credo just as the ark functions in the Jericho tale, the symbol of God's presence for removing the Canaanite inhabitants of the land.

An additional parallel confirms the identity of the ark in the covenant ceremony at Shechem. In Josh 24:26, Joshua writes the words of the Book of the Law, then sets a great stone at the sanctuary and names the stone a witness to the covenant agreement. In 1 Sam 6:14, the Levites establish a place for the golden figures sent by the Philistines with the ark on its return from captivity. V. 15 reports that the figures were transferred from the ark, then set on a great stone. V. 18 concludes: "The great stone, beside which they set the ark of the Lord, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh." It is obvious that Joshua of Beth Shemesh is not Joshua, the son of Nun. It is ironic that the ark continues in the tradition history with its association with the name of Israel's leader in the conquest. The more important point in this text, however, is the connection between the ark and a stone named a "witness" for the function of the covenant.

II

In the book of Joshua, the ark represents the leadership of Joshua just as in the Moses saga, the rod of God represents the leadership of Moses. In both cases, the double character of the tradition is apparent. Joshua is a heroic leader, but he also represents the leadership of God for his people. And the ark symbolizes Joshua's position for both roles. Moreover, the ark functions as the symbol of divine/human leadership for the conquest. This point appears with force not only in the pericope about crossing the Jordan but also in the account of the fall of Jericho. But in fact, the ark, particularly the ark in procession, covers the entire conquest theme in one degree or another.

A probe into the history of the tradition should set the configurations of the tradition into some kind of chronology. The hand of the Deuteronomistic Historian appears in this material most forcefully when the narrative sets Joshua as the successor to Moses, the ark being in Joshua's control but in some manner still the sign of Mosaic leadership. But the

picture of Joshua as the leader of the conquest, his leadership symbolized by the ark, derives from tradition as yet unaffected by the perspectives of the Deuteronomistic Historian. That point suggests that an evaluation of tradition history in Joshua must consider tradition about Joshua and the conquest that is not simply a pale copy of Moses. The tradition history seems firm in its picture of Joshua as the disciple of Moses, a new Moses for leading the people (so, Josh 1:1). But that configuration reflects tradition constructed in a chronological order, just as the sequence represented by the series, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, reflects the process that set traditions about the patriarchs in chronological order. The role of the ark in the Joshua tradition points to a Joshua tradition that has independent status, an independent history. And that fact suggests that Joshua carries significance for the theology of the Old Testament that does not simply stand in the shadow of Moses. Support for this suggestion comes from the character of the Joshua story as a heroic saga in its own right, like the Moses saga, but not simply a copy.¹¹ For the purposes of this probe, however, the function of the ark in the book of Joshua suggests the independent significance of Joshua the hero for the early traditions of Israel.

If the book of Joshua has status before the hand of the Deuteronomistic Historian reduces Joshua to the servant/minister of Moses, then the old questions about the literary history of Joshua must be reconsidered. Does the priestly source appear in the narrative? Does the Yahwist have a role to play here? But of even more importance than these questions is the issue of the relationship between Joshua and the Pentateuch. Does the traditio-historical character of the Joshua saga call for consideration of the larger unity represented by the juxtaposition of patriarchal sagas, Moses saga, and Joshua saga? Is it not necessary, in the light of the tradition's history connecting the ark, Joshua, and the conquest on a pattern that is comparable to the rod, Moses, and the exodus-wilderness, to see the Joshua saga not as a pale copy, but as a complement to the Moses narrative? Would that not call for a reconsideration of the Hexateuch, not on the basis of source continuity (J and P in Joshua) but on the basis of form and genre, indeed, on the basis of tradition unity?

A probe into the history of the ark tradition in Joshua also calls for consideration of the ark/Joshua tradition beyond the book of Joshua. Joshua, the son of Nun, appears rarely outside of the Hexateuch. 1 Kgs

11. Coats (1986). Some question about the definition of genre for both the Moses narratives and the Joshua narratives as biography might be raised. The point to be emphasized here, however, is that, regardless of proper identification of the class, the Moses story and the Joshua story belong to the same group.

16:34 refers to the curse on anyone who would rebuild Jericho, a curse attached to the words of Joshua in the ritual destruction of the city (Josh 6:24). But the ark maintains its position in Israel's traditions. The bronze serpent of Moses plays some role in the Temple (2 Kgs 18:4). But it does not mark leadership. It is simply a part of the Temple's paraphernalia. But the ark continues to function as a symbol of leadership in Israel after Joshua's death. Josh 24:29–30 reports simply that Joshua died without developing the *topos* as a critical part of the Joshua saga. Moreover, the next stage of the narrative about Israel's early history, the Judges, makes no use of the ark as a sign of leadership in the tribal conventions. Judg 20:27 puts the ark in Bethel, but no sign of leadership is attached to the note. The function of the ark highlights leadership again in the Samuel tradition (1 Samuel 3–6). In the Saul tradition, location of the ark in Gibeah (1 Sam 7:1) may imply a connection between the ark and the hero of Gibeah. But consideration of the impact of a Joshua symbol for the leadership of Saul is necessary. The ark points to the northern provenance for the Saul tradition and suggests that the kingship of Saul stands in line with the leadership of Joshua.

Moreover, the move of David to bring the ark from Gibeah (2 Sam 6:5) must be understood as an act of symbolic importance designed to appropriate the Joshua tradition for David's royal theology. The connection establishes some concern to validate Davidic kingship through connection with Saul since the ark had belonged to Saul and resided in Gibeah. But the important item in this movement of the ark is the function of the Joshua tradition in validating claim to the land. The movement of the ark in 2 Samuel 6 and again in 2 Samuel 15 points to issues of land control. And in this sense, Saul, David, and Solomon use the ark to validate claims to kingship. The issue is not to place the new king in line with the tradition of Joshua's leadership, at least in the first order. It is to establish a legitimate claim for control of the land.

This probe into the history of the ark tradition has not defined the origin of the ark from either the perspectives of tradition history or the concerns of social and political history. It does suggest that at a very early stage in its history, the ark belonged to the north. It argues that the connections between Joshua and the ark cannot be dismissed as secondary, being simply the projections of later institutions. To the contrary, it suggests that Joshua traditions embrace the ark from the beginning. It is not possible to conceive of Joshua traditions without the ark. Indeed, the role of the ark in the Joshua narratives suggests that Joshua must have had a far greater role in Israel's tradition history, independent of the Moses traditions, than would be suggested by the Deuteronomistic Historian.

Moreover, the connection between the ark and the conquest appears to be primary. But from this exploration, it is not possible to define origins. The ark may in fact predate Joshua and the conquest traditions. But in the book of Joshua, the ark functions at an early date as a symbol of God's act in securing the land for the people under the leadership of Joshua the hero. From the point of view in Joshua, there is no fundamental connection between ark and tent or ark and temple. The ark stays in a house in Gibeah. But the point is of no importance for Joshua. The symbol for God's act in securing the land, for Joshua's heroic leadership in effecting God's act in securing the land, is the ark. And at this point, it has no house as the place of its rest. It is alone as the symbol of Joshua and the conquest. The role of the ark in this tradition does not prove that the ark was historically an object of Israel's common life before the monarchy used it in Jerusalem. But it does suggest that for the early tradition, as yet unaffected by the monarchy, it was a key facet. For the tradition, the ark, the symbol of Joshua's leadership, marks the central event in the sacred past. That event lies at the heart of the conquest theme, not the exodus or the wilderness theme.

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