

THE DESIGNATION OF THE ARK IN PRIESTLY THEOLOGY

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It has long been recognized that there are various designations for the ark in the Hebrew Bible and that a thorough investigation of the designations would allow one to trace the evolution of the ark's function and meaning in various periods of its history.¹ Such an analysis, though inadequate in and of itself, would indeed be a good starting point for a study of the ark in Priestly theology.

The Hebrew ^ʔ*arôn* occurs 202 times in the Hebrew Bible. Not all of these, of course, refer to the cultic object which is the subject of our investigation. In 2 Kgs 12:10–11, and 2 Chron 24:8, 10, 11 (*bis*), ^ʔ*arôn* refers to a cashbox used for the collection of temple taxes. In another instance (Gen 50:26), the word is used of the sarcophagus in which the body of Joseph was placed. In the remaining 195 instances, however ^ʔ*arôn* clearly refers to the cultic object, the ark. These are distributed as follows:

Designation	Deut						TOTAL
	JE	Deut	Hist	P	Chron	OTHER	
^ʔ <i>Arôn</i>	1	4	18	19	16		58
^ʔ <i>Arôn</i> ^ʔ <i>elōhîm</i>			25		12		37
^ʔ <i>Arôn</i> ^ʔ <i>elōhē yisrāʔēl</i>			7				7
^ʔ <i>Arôn</i> <i>YHWH</i>			32		6		38
^ʔ <i>Arôn habberîṭ</i>	2	1	24		12	1	40
^ʔ <i>Arôn hāʿēḏūt</i>			1?	11			12
^ʔ <i>Arôn haqqōdeš</i>					1		1
^ʔ <i>Arôn</i> ^ʿ <i>uzzeḱā</i>					1	1	2
Total	3	5	107	30	48	2	195

1. See the seminal study of Seyring (1891, pp. 114–125). Cf. also Maier (1965, esp. pp. 82–83).

The word ar^{on} occurs by itself, with or without the definite article, a total of 58 times.² This is the simplest designation for the ark, and is found in all the sources of the Pentateuch,³ as well as in the Deuteronomistic History⁴ and in the Chronicler's work.⁵ No pattern can be discerned in its distribution. In two other categories, however, one notices distribution patterns that are significant for a study of P's understanding of the ark.

I

In a separate category, I have classified the occurrences of ar^{on} used in construct with a divine name (DN). These include essentially two variants, one with the name el^{ohim} and one with *YHWH*.⁷ As one would expect, modern scholars commonly assign the two variants of the formula "ark of DN"—especially in the Samuel narratives—to different strata of traditions and/or argue for the relative antiquity of one or the other variant.⁸ But the attempts to establish the priority of one or the other designation on the basis of the MT—not to mention the idiosyncratic translations of the Greek (McCarter, 1980)—are simply unconvincing. In fact, it would appear from the MT of 1 Sam 5:2–3 that both designations were used interchangeably.

A significant fact in the distribution, however, has escaped notice, namely, the complete absence of the name "ark of DN" in the Priestly work. This designation occurs 82 times in the Hebrew Bible, but not once in P. Moreover, the variant designation "the covenant-ark of DN" is found in 30 instances—in JE, Dtn, DtrH, and Chronicles—but the

2. I include in this count references to ar^{on} in Exod 25:10 and Deut 10:1, 3. In these passages, the word is usually taken as *status constructus* (so, for instance, *GKC* 128o; Mandelkern, 1962, p. 143; Maier, 1965, p. 84). I am inclined to think, however, that e^{y} and $\text{e}^{\text{y}} \text{šittim}$ are simply accusatives of material (see *GKC* 117hh; Joüon, 1921, p. 125v). Cf. the construction *wayyāšer YHWH elohim eī-hā'ādām apār* (Gen 2:7), and, more poignantly, *wayyā'as besal'el et hā'arōn ašē šittim* (Exod 37:1).

3. Num 10:35 (JE); Exod 25:10, 14 (2x), 15, 16, 21 (2x); 31:7; 35:12; 37:1, 5(2x); 40:3, 20 (3x), 21; Lev 16:2; Num 3:31 (all P); Deut 10:1, 2, 3, 5.

4. Josh 3:14, 15 (2x), 17; 4:10; 6:4, 9; 8:33; 1 Sam 6:13; 7:2; 2 Sam 6:4; 11:11; 1 Kgs 8:3, 5, 7 (2x), 9, 21.

5. 1 Chron 6:16; 13:9, 10, 13; 15:23; 16:37; 2 Chron 5:4, 5, 6, 8 (2x), 9, 10, 11.

6. In DtrH 1 Sam 3:3; 4:11, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22; 5:1, 2, 10 (2x); 14:18 (2x); 2 Sam 6:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12 (2x); 7:2, 15:24, 25, 29. In Chron, 1 Chron 13:3 ($\text{ar}^{\text{on}} \text{elohenu}$), 5, 6 ($\text{ar}^{\text{on}} \text{ha}^{\text{elohim}} \text{YHWH } yōšeb \text{ hakkerubim}$), 7, 12, 14: 15:1, 2, 15, 24; 16:1; 2 Chron 1:4.

7. Josh 3:13; 4:5 ($\text{ar}^{\text{on}} \text{YHWH } \text{elohenu}$), 11; 6:6, 7, 11, 12, 13 (2x); 7:6; 1 Sam 4:6; 5:3, 4; 6:1, 2, 8, 11, 15, 17, 18, 21; 7:1 (2x); 2 Sam 6:9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17; 1 Kgs 2:26 (MT $\text{ar}^{\text{on}} \text{aqdnai } \text{YHWH}$); 8:26; 1 Chron 15:2, 3, 12 ($\text{ar}^{\text{on}} \text{YHWH } \text{elohē } yisrā'el$), 14; 16:4; 2 Chron 8:11.

Priestly designation Arôn hā'ēdūt does not occur with a divine name even once. In short, arôn occurs with one or another divine name 112 times in the Hebrew Bible, but never in P. There is a deliberate attempt in the Priestly material, it appears, to *avoid* the use of the divine name in close association with the ark.

There can be no doubt that the ark came to be associated with divine names from the earliest periods of its history because of its function as a symbol of divine presence. It would appear from some of the earliest texts pertaining to the ark that it once functioned as a war palladium, the presence of which, it was thought, assured the presence of the Divine Warrior in battle on the side of the Israelites.

There is one recorded instance, however, when the presence of the ark did not ensure victory for Israel and her god—or so it seemed at first (Miller and Roberts, 1977, pp. 32–75). Defeated by the Philistines at Ebenezer, the Israelites sent for the divine ark so that God “may come into our midst and save us from the power of our enemies” (1 Sam 4:3). Rightly or wrongly, there were at least some who believed that the presence of the divine ark (arôn hā'elōhîm) would guarantee the presence of God in battle. The divine ark, it would seem, functioned as Israel's equivalent of the divine statue in Mesopotamia, though the people of Israel would certainly have maintained that their symbol of divine presence was manifestly aniconic. At any rate, the Philistines appeared to have understood what the ark meant, for when the ark was brought into the battlefield, the narrator tells us, they cried out: “God (elōhîm) has come into the camp!” (1 Sam 4:7). Nevertheless, Israel was defeated in spite of the ark's presence, and, in fact, the ark was captured. The loss of the ark was mourned (1 Sam 4:19–22) as the departure of the kābôd from Israel's midst (1 Sam 4:21–22).⁹

In connection with the ark at Ebenezer, it should be noted that it is called in the text $\text{arôn berîṭ YHWH šebā'ôt yôšeb hakkerûhîm}$ (1 Sam 4:4).¹⁰ This was the fullest designation of the ark and was probably its “liturgical name” (Cross, 1973, p. 69) used in the period of the monarchy in conjunction with the Jerusalem cultus (Mettinger, 1982b, pp. 135f.).

There is, of course, no consensus among scholars regarding the meaning of YHWH šebā'ôt .¹¹ The debates are centered on two issues: (1) the

8. So, for instance, Westphal (1908, pp. 86–87) and von Rad (1958, p. 121).

9. 1 Sam 4:21–22. Cf. Ps 78:60–61. On PN ikābôd , see McCarter (1980, pp. 115f.) and Mettinger (1982a, p. 121).

10. Cf. 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chron 13:6; Isa 37:16. See also the discussions of Albright (1948, pp. 377–381) and Mettinger (1982b, pp. 111–113).

11. For a survey of scholarship on the epithet YHWH šebā'ôt see Schmitt (1972, pp. 145–159) and Mettinger (1982b, pp. 109–111) and Maier (1965, pp. 50–54).

syntax and (2) the meaning of *šebā'ôt* (Mettinger, 1982b, pp. 109–111). The first issue cannot occupy us here.¹² As for the meaning of *šebā'ôt*, one should note that it has been variously thought to refer to earthly or celestial armies, natural and celestial elements, the divine council, or even demons.¹³ The most recent studies, moreover, have pointed to the predominantly royal contexts (Ross, 1967, pp. 76–94)—in the tradition of Zion and the temple (Mettinger, 1982a)—in the designation is found.

The ark was undeniably the most vital symbol of divine presence in the period of the monarchy. Its place in the legitimization of Zion and the Davidic kings should not be underestimated. David led it in procession into Jerusalem with all the ceremonies reminiscent of those carried out by Assyrian kings when they ushered the divine statue into their cities.¹⁴ Perhaps in imitation of David's historic (McCarter, 1983, pp. 276f.)—and politically significant!—procession, the ark was periodically carried in a procession, probably culminating in the placement of the ark in the *deḥîr* of the temple, where it stood as a symbol of divine enthronement in God's temple (*hēkāl*).¹⁵ Whether the ark actually functioned as a throne¹⁶ or, more probably, as the footstool of the divine throne,¹⁷ it is clear that it was associated with the presence of the divine King, the King of Glory,¹⁸ in the temple of Zion. Thus Hezekiah was able to come to the temple to stand before “*YHWH šebā'ôt*, the God of Israel, who sits enthroned upon the cherubim” (Isa 37:16).

In view of the traditional understanding of the ark as the supreme symbol of divine immanence in the temple and in Zion, one must ask why P would have so assiduously avoided calling that cultic object “the ark of God”? Or was P deliberately denying the traditional associations because they no longer made sense in the situation in which he found himself?

In a recent monograph Tryggve Mettinger suggests that the Priestly theology of divine presence was, in part, a response to the “cognitive dissonance” that arose in the wake of the exile (Mettinger, 1982a,

12. See the concise discussion of Mettinger (1982b).

13. For a survey of various opinions, see Wambacq (1947, pp. 1–45).

14. See Miller and Roberts (1977, pp. 16–17) and McCarter (1983, pp. 273–278).

15. On the significance of the temple (*hēkāl*) for a victorious god, see Kapelrud (1963, pp. 56–62) and Clifford (1979, pp. 137–145).

16. For a classical definition of this hypothesis, see Dibelius (1906). For further references see Maier (1965, p. 55 n. 97) and the survey of Schmitt (1972, pp. 121–122).

17. The clearest reference to such a view of the ark is 1 Chron 28:2, but see also Pss 99:5, 132:7; Lam 2:1. For a recent restatement of this view, see Mettinger (1982a, pp. 19–24).

18. Ps 24:7–10. See Roberts (1980, pp. 5–10).

pp. 16f.). Independently of Mettinger, I had concluded in 1980 that P's understanding of the ark should be seen in the light of the "crisis of faith brought about by the catastrophic events" that caused Israel to lose her traditional symbols of divine presence, not least of which was the ark (Seow, 1980). In the early days of the exile,¹⁹ P wrote a theology of comfort and hope in which he assured the exiles that all was not lost even if the physical symbols were (cf. Klein, 1979, pp. 125–148). God was still present, even if the ark was not; the *berît* was still good, even if the ark was no more.

Although there can be no absolutes in scholarship, the lines of evidence converge on the first half of the sixth century B.C.E. as the period during which the ark was lost (*contra* Haran, 1963, pp. 46–58). In the first place, the ark has a prominent place in the work of the Deuteronomist(s) although nothing is said of its disappearance, except perhaps in a veiled manner in the incorporation of the Ark Narrative. A tradition apparently remembers that the ark was still in existence during the time of Josiah; for, as the Chronicler tells us (2 Chron 35:3), Josiah ordered that the ark be brought into the temple. In the prophecy of Jeremiah, moreover, one also finds a possible allusion to the presence of the ark in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E., for the prophet is said to have prophesied—*vaticinium ex eventu?*—that the ark would soon be lost:

They shall no longer say, "The covenant-ark of YHWH." It shall not come to mind, they will not remember it, they will not visit (it). It shall no longer be made. At that time, Jerusalem shall be called the throne of YHWH. . . .²⁰

In this connection, one should call attention to the tradition that Jeremiah hid the ark (and the tent of meeting) at an unknown place during the exile (2 Macc 2:4–5). It seems clear that this particular tradition

19. There have been several attempts in recent years to revive Kaufmann's thesis (1960, pp. 153–211) that P is to be dated in the pre-exilic period. So, for instance, Friedman (1981); Hurvitz (1982); Rendsburg (1980, pp. 65–80); Zevit (1982, pp. 481–511). These works, as well as the study of Polzin (1976), have been successful only in demonstrating the improbability of a post-exilic date for P. The linguistic arguments which, in my opinion, carry the most weight do not demand a pre-exilic date for the *composition* of P. Rather, they probably indicate that P was the work of a conservative "scholar" who was schooled in an earlier generation. The writer's archaic style and vocabulary reflect not so much the language of his younger contemporaries but, rather, the language which he was taught. In any case, the issue is hardly settled. I am still inclined to think that the bulk of P belongs to the exilic period. Traditional arguments for such a date need not be repeated here. I need only to point out that scholars who argue for a pre-exilic date usually concede that there are problematic traces of "late" (i.e., exilic) materials.

20. Jer 3:16–17a. Cf. Weiser (1952, pp. 35–37).

knows of the ark's disappearance in the exilic period, and it attempts to convince its audience that the sacred object did not fall into foreign hands but remained in the custody of the faithful.

A further allusion to the exilic disappearance of the ark is found in the lament that God had cast down "from heaven to earth" the *tip³ereṭ yisrā³ēl* and that he had not remembered his "footstool."²¹ The fate of the ark is not spelled out in this text, and, indeed, one may never know whether it was destroyed or carried away. Nevertheless, one should note in passing that there is a claim in 2 Esth 10:20–22 that the sanctuary was destroyed and the ark was taken as spoil in the exilic period. It is not surprising, therefore, that one should find no ark in Josephus' description of the inner sanctum of the second temple:

The innermost recess measures twenty cubits, and was screened in like manner from the outer portion by a veil. In this stood nothing whatever. . . .

(*The Jewish War* V 5.5)

Given this situation, it seems to me that one cannot speak of P's understanding of the ark without addressing the issue of the ark's disappearance. Or, to echo Mettinger, one cannot fully understand P's "hermeneutic" apart from his attempt to speak to the experience of "dissonance" wrought by the violence of destruction and exile. What could an exilic theologian say about the ark, given the traditional understanding(s) of it and given the contradictory messages which destruction brought?

First of all, I am inclined to agree with Mettinger that, for P, the ark and cherubim no longer symbolized the enthronement of *YHWH seḅā³ôṭ* as they did in the period of the Monarchy, especially under the aegis of the Zion ideologists (1982a). P's ark was neither the throne nor the footstool placed beneath the cherubim throne. Rather, it was an extraordinarily ornate object—which perhaps accounts for its loss—with the golden cherubim upon its Cover.²² The majestic cherubim in the Solomonic temple, which symbolized the enthronement of the ever present God, were reduced to little, though ostentatious, adornments for the Cover of the ark. Indeed, the very mention of a Cover for the ark served to emphasize its function as a container (*ʿarôn!*) for the tablets and to de-emphasize, nay, to *deny* that the ark functioned as a divine throne or

21. Lam 2:1. It is, of course, not certain that *hdm* here refers to the ark, though the parallelism with *tip³ereṭ yisrā³ēl* is suggestive (Cf. Ps 78:61).

22. That is to say, a "cover" for the box symbolizing the "covering" of sins. So in classical Arabic *kafara* "to cover, hide" as well as "to expiate"!

a footstool. The ark was emphatically made *for* the covenant-tablets (^c*ēdqūt*).

It seems clear, then, that P was trying to “de-mythologize” the ark, as it were. But the tendency to associate the ark with the divine presence had been so strong that P was compelled not only to “de-throne” the ark but also to dissociate the ark from the divine name; for the association of the ark with DN had led to a theology of divine immanence that could no longer be maintained. Against the grain of traditional thinking P wanted to stress that God was *not necessarily* where the ark was!

For P, the ark was no longer the seat of divine presence, so to speak, but it was still a concrete location where God came from time to time to meet (*nô^caq*) with the congregation (^c*ēdqā*).²³ P would concede that the ark was an appropriate *rendezvous* for the people to encounter the divine being; but it was certainly not the only one. The deity could be present at the ark, even as traditions affirmed, but that was not tantamount to limiting God to a fixed location. P preferred to speak of divine presence in terms of the *kāḥôd*, “Glory”, or ^c*ānān* “cloud”, which were present at the critical moments in the history of the people.²⁴ This was true not only after the Tent of Meeting or Tabernacle came into existence, but even before. In fact, one could even say that for P the Glory-Cloud actually “tabernacled” on Mount Sinai (*wayyiškôn kebôd-YHWH^c al-har sînai*) even before there was a Tabernacle, *miškān* (Exod 24:16). By implication, then, God could still abide in the midst of the people even after the concrete symbols of Presence were no more. God’s presence was not limited by the existence of a box (^ʔ*arôn*).

II

In another category of ark-designations I have included the names ^ʔ*arôn habberîṭ* (DN)²⁵ and ^ʔ*arôn hā^cēdqūt*.²⁶ Immediately evident here is the distinctiveness of P’s terminology for the ark. The occurrence of ^ʔ*arôn hā^cēdqūt* outside the Priestly material is found only in Josh 4:16, which, however, may be a Priestly gloss. Even more surprising, perhaps, is the complete absence of the designation ^ʔ*arôn habberîṭ* in P, a work

23. Exod 25:22; 29:42–43; 30:6, 36; Num 17:19.

24. Exod 16:7, 10; 24:16–17; 29:43; 40:34–38; Lev 9:6, 23; 16:2; Num 9:10; 14:10; 16:19; 17:7; 20:6.

25. Num 10:33; 14:44; Deut 10:8; 31:9, 25, 26; Josh 3:3, 6 (2x), 8, 11; 4:7, 9, 18; 6:6, 8; 8:33; Judg 20:27; 1 Sam 4:3, 4 (2x), 5; 2 Sam 15:24; 1 Kgs 3:15; 6:19; 8:1, 6; 1 Chron 15:25, 26, 28, 29; 16:6, 37; 17:11; 22:19; 28:2, 18; 2 Chron 5:2, 7; Jer 3:16. Note also Josh 3:14 (*hā^ʔarôn habberîṭ*), 17 (*hā^ʔarôn berîṭ YHWH*).

26. Exod 25:22; 26:33, 34; 30:6, 26; 39:35; 40:3, 5, 21; Num 4:5; 7:89; Josh 4:16.

which Wellhausen appropriately called *Liber quattuor foederum*. It is indeed very strange that P, for whom the idea of God's eternal covenant was so central, would not have characterized the ark as arôn habberî .²⁷

In recent years scholars have come to something of a consensus on the basic meaning of edût .²⁸ It is generally agreed that the word has been wrongly derived by translators, ancient and modern, from wd "to warn, admonish, testify." Hence the translation "ark of testimony" for P's arôn hâ edût . Rather, as scholars now concede, the term edût is used by P in the context of the cult and its appurtenances as a sort of synonym for berî . This is already suggested by the Greek translation of edût as *diathēkē* in a few instances,²⁹ though one could argue, of course, that the Greek translators were merely interpreting edût to mean "covenant" or that they were influenced by the terminology of the older traditions. At any rate, it is noteworthy that P calls the stone tablets *luhôt hâ edût* (Exod 31:18), whereas they called *luhôt habberî* in Deuteronomy (Deut 9:9, 15). The parallelism of edût and berî in the Psalms has, of course, been noted frequently (von Rad, 1947, pp. 214f.). But edût is no mere synonym for berî in P. Indeed, berî is known to P and even figures importantly in his theology. The ark is associated with berî in 40 instances throughout the Hebrew Bible; but P, though he knew the word, completely avoided use of the word in connection with the ark. It appears that P wanted to eschew certain connotations that the designation "ark of the berî " conjured up, connotations which might not have been appropriate for his view of the ark. It is inadequate, then, to point out that edût could mean "covenant" and that it was used as a synonym of berî . Rather, one must ask why P would use a different word for "covenant" if he already knew the word berî . Indeed, what did P mean by edût ?

The word edût is, of course, not original with P; nor is it unique to Hebrew. Already in the second millennium B.C.E. we have reference in Egyptian to dt , "conspiracy" (i.e., agreement to a plot), which may be related to Hebrew edût (Kitchen, 1979, p. 460). Unfortunately, the word does not occur frequently enough in Egyptian for it to be useful for our analysis of its meaning.

27. On covenant theology in P, see esp. Zimmerli (1963, pp. 205–216) and Kutsch (1974, pp. 361–388).

28. Hillers (1969, pp. 158–166); Cross (1973, pp. 265–273); Veijola (1976, pp. 347–349); Parnas (1975, pp. 235–246 [in Hebrew]); cf. Volkwein (1969, pp. 18–40).

29. Exod 27:21; 31:7; 39:15; Josh 4:16 (*tēn kibōton tēs diathēkēs tou martyriou kyriou!*).

In early Aramaic we have the lexeme ^cdy³ (always in the plural; see Moran, 1963, p. 173) referring to "treaty stipulations," or, simply, "treaty" (Fitzmyer, 1961, p. 186). That much is generally agreed upon by scholars. It should be pointed out, however, that the term could also refer to the "treaty" in the concrete sense of a *treaty document*. In this regard I should call attention to the statement: *wn[sb³ ^cm spr³ z]nh šm w^cdy³ 3In* "and he has set up the st[ela with t]his [inscription], and this ^cdy³ as well."³⁰ Furthermore, in another context, the gods are also asked to "look at" the ^cdy³ of [king] Bar-Ga^cyah (Sefire i A, 13, see Fitzmyer, 1961). This again suggests that the ^cdy³ may be understood in a very concrete manner.

There can be little doubt that the Aramaic ^cdy³ is related to Akkadian *adû* (also *plurale tantum*), though the nature of the relationship is not settled. The *adû* in Akkadian is, properly, a *written and formalized agreement*, usually imposed upon an inferior by a suzerain (Gelb, 1962, p. 161). Various verbs are used in connection with the *adû*, including *šakānu* "to set up," *našāru* "to guard," *epēšu* "to make," *šabātu* "to take," and *šaṭāru* "to write."³¹ These suggest that *adû* should be taken concretely to mean "treaty stipulations," or the like. The word may also be used in connection with the formalization of the *adê*. Thus it is said: *ilāni ana adê [l]illikuni* "let the gods come to the *adê* (ABL 213:10), *in adê attalaka* "I went away from the *adê*" (ABL 57:12), and *adannu ša adê ša Bābili ul akšudu* "I did not arrive at the right moment for the *adê* of Babylon" (ABL 202:15).

In some instances, *adû* can also be taken to refer to the *treaty document* itself. Thus we note the following expressions in Akkadian: *[ina libbi] adê iššaṭir* (CAD A/1, 132) "it is written in the *adê*" (ABL 831 r 2), *ina libbi adê qābi* "it is said in the *adê*" (ABL 656 r 19), *ina libbi adê [šaṭir]* (*Ibid.*) "in the *adê* it is written" (ABL 1110:19), *arrāti mala ina adêšunu šaṭra* "all the curses which are written in their *adê*" (Streck, *Asb.* 76 ix 60). It seems that the word *adû* is used freely in place of the more specific *ṣuppi adê*³² "tablet of the *adê*" in the same way that ^cdwt is used in place of *luḥôt hā^cēdūt*.

Within the Hebrew Bible itself, ^cēdūt is used synonymously with or at least parallel to *berūt*, *ḥuqqīm*, *mišpāt*, and *tôrāh*. The evidence suggests the basic meaning "treaty(-stipulations)," a meaning borne out by the cognates. In P, however, one could be even more specific. The word in P

30. Sefire i A, 6-7. Restoration of Dupont-Sommer in the *editio princeps* (Dupont-Sommer and Starcky, 1958, pp. 197-351) on the basis of i C 17.

31. Wiseman, 1958, p. 81; CAD A/1, 131-134.

32. ABL 90.6; 539.15; Craig, *ABRT* 1 23 ii 27; Borger, 1956, p. 109 iv 20.

is always used of tangible objects, namely, the stone tablets given at Sinai. P's understanding of the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$ as concrete objects is clear in Exod 31:

[God] gave to Moses—when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai— two tablets of the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$, stone tablets, written with the finger of God (v. 18).

In other contexts, the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$ refers to the objects that were put into the ark:

You shall put the Cover over the ark, on top, but into the ark you shall put the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$.³³

The word $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$ in P, I would argue, does not refer to treaty or covenant in the general sense, but specifically to the stone tablets or to the *concretization* of the covenant at Sinai. Significantly, there is no mention anywhere of the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$ being remembered by God or by human beings, nor is there any exhortation to keep the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$. Concerning the *berit*, on the other hand, one reads:

As for you, you shall keep my *berit*, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my *berit* which you shall keep. . . . (Gen 17:9–10)

The difference between *berit* and $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$, then, is neither the difference between promise (*berit*) and fulfillment ($^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$),³⁴ nor is it the difference between obligation on the part of the Suzerain (*berit*) and obligation on the part of the people ($^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$) (Hillers, 1969, pp. 16–20). For P, I suggest, the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$ was merely the concretization of the covenant that had been in existence from ancient times (*berit* $^{\text{c}}\acute{o}l\bar{a}m!$). It was not at Sinai that the covenant was first established for the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\bar{a}$. Rather, the covenant was established for the people even before the concretization of it at Sinai. The reality of the covenant could never be defined by the physical representation of it. The disappearance or destruction of the stone tablets was not tantamount to the negation of the covenant. P would have pointed out that only the $^{\text{c}}\bar{e}d\dot{u}t$ was destroyed;³⁵ the covenant was just as real *after* the concrete representation was gone as it was *before* the concrete tablets were made. Indeed the shattering of the “covenant” would have been unthinkable to P. The covenant which God had given was *berit* $^{\text{c}}\acute{o}l\bar{a}m!$ Surely the exiles could take comfort in that; they could still

33. Exod 25:21; cf. 26:34; 27:8; 30:6; 31:18; 40:20; Lev 16:2, 13; Num 7:89.

34. So Zimmerli (1963, pp. 205–216); Clements (1965, p. 111).

35. So the *adit* of Esarhaddon and his vassals were found in smashed condition—perhaps deliberately!

believe in the promise of God to them, they could still affirm that God was in their midst, even if the physical symbols were no more.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ABL Harper, R. F. 1886–1914. *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*. 1–14. Chicago.
- ABRT Craig, J. 1895–7. *Assyrian and Babylonian Religious Texts*. Leipzig.

- CAD *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago.
- GKC Kautzsch, E. (ed.) 1910. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar.*