

The Historical Context of the Ark of the Covenant

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[0 : 00] It's certainly my pleasure to be with you today. As you can see, we are going to be talking about the historical context of the Ark of the Covenant. Now, for the one person in the room who never went to Sunday school and never saw Raiders of the Lost Ark, the Ark of the Covenant is the box used to hold the tablets of the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai.

The Ark is first described in Exodus 25 and is one of four pieces of furniture that was used in the Israelite tabernacle.

We have here illustrated all four pieces to scale. The bronze altar of burnt offerings, the incense altar, the offering table, and then the Ark of the Covenant tucked in the back there.

Now, when I first went to study the Ark of the Covenant, I ran into this dilemma, which is that it seemed in the biblical text to sort of arise out of nowhere.

But that's not the way Israelite religion typically works. It typically uses elements that it borrows or that is part of its native context.

[1 : 30] So this was really strange, and this is what prompted me to study the Ark to begin with. But when I started looking at the background literature, I found this very, very strange dichotomy.

And I kind of chalked it up that the fact is that this is a very sensational topic. Obviously, because we've got a packed house here.

So there's a certain amount of interest. But when you have a sensational topic, what often happens is views tend to polarize between two extreme positions.

And we have these two positions listed on the slide here. One views the Ark as sort of an allegory or a myth. And the other views it as the object of treasure hunting.

Now, the Ark, at the skeptical extreme, is the view that the Ark is nothing but an allegory or myth. And liberal theology, pretty much from its inception, has had this view.

[2 : 36] Julius Wellhausen thought that the Ark was a reverse projection back into the history of Israel. Gerhard von Rod thought that the Ark was an assimilation of one of the shrines that was used by the 12 tribes that became incorporated into the history of Israel.

And in perhaps the most pompous explanation, Martin Nall suggested that the Ark, if it existed at all, that it was nothing more than a simple wood box, the shabby, unadorned remnants of an ancient shrine.

And the description from Exodus 25 was propaganda of 6th century Israelites living in Babylon, trying to magnify the dreams of an idealized past.

Now, while it's easy just to pick on the liberals here, conservatives have a version of this. And are complete, are not immune from this point of view.

In, but with conservative theology, it tends to view the Ark as, as primarily in regards to its Christological significance.

[4 : 02] And authors of this view sort of take the bent that if the Ark existed at all, its only purpose is how it relates to Christ. G.K. Beale, while a brilliant New Testament theologian, tends to view the symbols of the Old Testament, the temple, the Ark, creation, in primarily Christological terms, and doesn't really engage the symbols on its own merit.

Now, the problem with this view is it tends to carve out a new mythology out of the real object of the Old Testament, using the text as a pretext.

Now, when one has a skeptical extreme, it's only a matter of time before there's a reaction in the form of superstition.

Treasure hunting is hardly a new endeavor. And treasure hunting for the Ark of the Covenant is also not new. However, for our purposes, modern speculation began in the 19th century with

Freemasonry.

They saw the possession of the Ark as proof of their ancestral claims to be Solomonic Temple stonecutters. Those claims spurred on by the fantasies of the British Israelites prompted amateur treasure hunters to tear up the Irish archaeological site of Tara from 1899 to 1902.

[5 : 34] I mean, they just ripped into that site. They turned that whole site into a pig's breakfast. In the mid-1970s, with renewed eschatological interest among American evangelicals, books emphasizing rapture theology also gave rise to interest in the Temple Mount and all the furniture that went with it.

And at that time, a plethora of books began to be published, expressing one or more views of the location of the Ark. And this is just a sample of the covers.

Now, when you start reading these, it doesn't take reading very many of them to sort of get the idea they're all plagiarizing off of each other. In 1982, two rabbis, Shlomo Goran and Yehuda Getz, became convinced that the Ark was hidden in a cave under the Holy of Holies.

Now, the Talmud does give two accounts for the, regarding the fate of the Ark. The first states that the Ark was melted down by Nebuchadnezzar for gold.

The second suggests that the Ark was hidden by King Josiah under the Temple Mount where it remains today. Guess which view the two rabbis chose?

[6 : 57] Ron Wyatt added fuel to this fire, speculating that the Ark was under the garden tomb, painting a powerful picture of the blood of Christ actually touching the mercy seat of the Ark.

He even claimed to have seen the Ark with his own eyes. Yet no one has ever been able to corroborate his visit, his finds, making his story little more than a hoax.

Stuart Murrow Hay, in 2005, painted a lurid tale of the Ark hidden away in a church in Ethiopia. This is a reworking of Graham Hancock's 1992 hypothesis, as based upon the unreliable 13th century AD document, the Kebra Nagast.

And by Murrow Hay's own admission, is completely divorced from biblical exegesis, and age geography, and I might add, common sense. It is even safe to say if Murrow Hay and Hancock are correct, then the Bible is wrong about the last sightings of the Ark.

Now, all the efforts of the treasure hunters have been without academic or biblical merit.

[8 : 14] But they share the idea that what is most significant about the Ark is its location today. And they share the idea that the Ark is a vehicle that one uses as a voyage of faith.

Now, these works are intended to be primarily vicarious voyages of discovery. where the possible location is meant to inspire those who already believe.

And while voyages of faith are an important dynamic in how we believe, a world of possibilities divorced from fact neither enlightens nor educates. So, returning back to our excluded middle, given these two extremes, is there an excluded middle that can provide a more helpful way of dealing with the Ark?

Let me propose that if we treat the Ark as an ordinary object that may have existed in time and space, then there are possibly facts that we can learn from the material culture from which it came. Furthermore, if the Ark is an artifact that emerged from an Egyptian context, i.e., the Israelites came out of Egypt, we would expect then that the Ark would also be something that would come out of Egypt in its sort of ritual sense, then it may provide us, the Egyptian material may provide us with a good basis for comparison.

[9 : 42] Now, in order to make sense of the Ark, we need to talk a bit about the concept of sacred space as a primer.

In fact, I'm probably going to be giving you quite a bit of background info here. So, you're going to think at some point, what does this have to do with the Ark? It'll all be tied together and it'll eventually all make sense. Trust me.

But what we're going to do to start off this idea of what is sacred space is give you a little tour of an ancient Egyptian temple. And, what I'm using here is the Temple of Khonsu from Karnak.

It's a good sort of archetypal temple. And, temples of the Egyptian New Kingdom, despite variations in size and layout, all had a common language that became a consistent religious convention until the Roman period.

Now, starting from the outside, basically, the idea of sacred space is you've got profane space where all the impure, unholy, and nasty stuff happens and that's outside the walls.

[10:47] Okay? Inside the walls is all sacred space. But wait, there's more. Okay, the first area marked in blue. Now, this here is the pylon and what you have behind the pylon is two pillared halls.

A semi-covered hall called the peristyle and a covered hall called the hypostyle. And what these halls are is essentially the, sort of, they mimic the earthly realm.

when you go to temples in Egypt and you look at the hypostyle and peristyle, they're decorated in earthly motifs. Lotus columns, hunting scenes, ritual processions, basically stuff that happens on earth.

And this is the only section of the temple where, sort of, commoners are allowed during festivals. So this is the only part of the temple where, sort of, sacred and profane meet. Except, when it's not a festival, then if you're a commoner, you have to kind of go at the outside the walls and hope that God hears you.

But, that's another issue. Beyond the hypostyle is an inner court here. And, this is where the heavenly realm begins. There's a little door there called the doors of heaven that lead from earthly to heavenly realm.

[12:11] And, inside the inner court is where the, bark would be placed. It would be where most of the offerings are. And if you look, go inside there and you take a look, you'll see, like, stars and gods and heavenly motifs.

So there really is that heaven-earth dichotomy there. And then there's a shrine in the back. That's the inner shrine. That's where the God goes when he's tired and needs a nap.

Okay? They would literally, at night, put him to bed. I'm not joking. That's, that's, that's the purpose of the inner shrine. And, but that's not the most important place in the temple architecture.

The most important place in the temple architecture is right there. You'll notice two sort of bracket-shaped walls. That is what's called in Egyptian architecture the set whereat, the great seat or the great throne.

It's where the plinth was put and upon that plinth was a sacred bark. and inside the bark the God would be put during the daytime. Now, these, these, these, get the back.

[13:19] Ah. Okay. Uh, these bracket-shaped walls was actually a full shrine with a roof. So, think of it this way.

It's sort of a little temple inside a temple. It's like a Russian doll. You open up one doll, there's a doll inside. You open up another doll, there's a doll inside. So, this was the, sort of the doll inside the doll.

Okay. Now, I'm going to pause it for a moment and give you sort of a video tour of what it looks like to be inside one of these.

Alright, everyone ready? Yeah. So, we're coming down, we're entering into the pylon. We see, uh, the windows to the, uh, pylon there.

And we're going to enter into the peristyle. And then hyperstyle. And then into the set-bourette.

[14:28] And in the set-bourette was where a sacred bark was. Bark as a boat. It's a bark as a boat. I was going to explain that in a moment. Sorry. I was going to go ahead.

Okay. So, we can continue from there. Okay.

Okay. Okay. That's where we ended off in the, in the video tour. Now, it is a boat, uh, with a shrine on top.

Okay, a box shrine. On the deck of the boat are these little votive figures of kings. Because in Egyptian mythology, you did not serve a god directly.

You served through intermediaries. Okay. The only people worthy of serving a god were kings. So, gods serve kings, you serve, or kings serve gods, you serve kings.

[15:39] Egypt is a very stratified society. Okay. It's got rank. It's got, it's got status. It's all about status in Egypt. So, this is why when you look at these, you see kings on the decks.

They're the guys serving the gods. Now, what we have here is a shrine cabinet and it has two, uh, doors, one in front, one in back, with bolts.

And, this, this door here is the analog of the doors of heaven. Now, what we have on the, this is the view of the bark from the back.

And, Egyptians typically marked off sacred space with two sort of devices. One device is a frieze of cobras across the top called Uraeus or Uraei.

And, the purpose of these cobras was to keep bad things out. When you look at them on furniture, they're always facing outward. Think of them kind of like border guards.

[16:47] Okay. Trying to keep the bad stuff out of the country. Okay. That's what these, these cobras did, is, um, Pyramid Text 256 says that their bad coming is to spit out fire.

So, the Egyptians kind of view these like death rays. And, death rays that would spit out fire to keep out all the bad things. See the cobras?

Hmm? I don't see where the cobras are. Cobras are on the top. All those guys. Uh, and, uh, this freeze was added during the reigns of Seti I, Romes II.

So, over time, they were adding more and more symbols to these barks. Now, also on this was a vulture. And, the vulture was actually part of a linen veil that wrapped around the base.

and, this vulture was added to the barks during the reign of Moses I. And, veils as a means of separation was part of Egyptian convention during most of the New Kingdom.

[17:55] And, most of the time, it was to provide a way of separate the object, uh, from the onlooker by, while preserving its silhouette. But, what's interesting about the barks here is, it's only wrapped around the base.

so, the purpose of it seems to be more just to add this symbol onto the bark. And, the purpose of this symbol was, that, it would, the neckbed vulture would create a holiness by wrapping its arms around a space, its wings.

It's similar to the, um, uh, the psalmist that's who said that, uh, the Lord will wrap his wings around his, his people like chicks, like a hen does to chicks.

So, it's very similar along that vein. Now, inside that shrine, and this is a, uh, photo that I took at, uh, Luxor Temple, uh, dating to Amenhotep III, uh, you've got the god in the center, and you've got these two goddesses, Ma'at goddesses on the side.

But there's also, they also have wings. They've got one wing going up, one wing going down, one wing going up, one wing going down. The god is in the center of this holiness space, defined by wings.

[19:28] So that when we look at sacred space, we've, we've, I've already taken you to a whirlwind tour, a tour through the temple, you've got peristyle, hypostyle, inner court, private shrine, and the set, we're at the great seat, the bark sanctuary.

But we also see the same space repeated on the actual bark itself. You know, the deck, the stern, and those are basically votive areas, like the peristyle, the hypostyle, and private shrine.

But you also have the shrine cabinet with the twin goddesses, also creating that sacred space. space. So you've got a sacred space within a sacred space within a sacred space.

So that's sort of your primer on sacred space, but it's going to get more complex. So we're not done yet. But now I've got to introduce you to the concept of ritual processional furniture, because ultimately when we study the ark, it's going to come down to, it's a kind of furniture.

furniture. So, but it's a very, very special kind of furniture. Now, the class of object involved here was first coined as ritual processional objects by Catherine Eaton in 2005.

[20:53] My research narrowed that category down to just furniture. and I published my dissertation in 2015.

So I looked at just ritual processional furniture. Now, my research found that there are certain attributes to this furniture that were different than say your ordinary stool, chair, table.

One, RPF, which is an abbreviation, ritual processional furniture, must have a ritual or religious use. Does the item have a cultic use in harem to the object?

Is the object used in a ceremony of some kind? Does it help sanctify sacred space? It must have a repeated, periodic, or continuous use in a procession or parade.

Okay? So this excludes furniture that may have been attended for have a one-time use, processional use like coffins, or stools, or stuff that wasn't meant to be moved.

[22:03] RPF has to be dedicated or somehow connected to a person. Okay? So for example, the sacred bark of Amon Ray, or the ritual box of Romsey II.

It has to be connected to a person in some respect. Your typical chair isn't. Okay? Unless you go to a park somewhere and see a dedication on a bench. Most stationary furniture does not have the connection to an actual person.

RPF is often carried, often has carrying poles placed below the center of gravity. Now this one is very interesting. Because if you want to carry a box on poles, and you're lugging this thing around, if you want the most stable place to put the poles, you put it at the top of the item.

Put it at the top of the item above the center of gravity, because that's the most stable. That makes it easiest to carry. But let's say your purpose is not to just carry the object, but to show it off, so that everyone sees it.

Well, then you want the most visibility. So you put the poles at the bottom of the item to elevate the object so everyone sees it. Most ritual processional furniture will have the carrying poles below the center of gravity.

[23 : 28] And finally, there is the presence of religious symbols and iconography as a diagnostic feature. Now, not all ritual processional furniture has it, but when you do see it, it's very helpful.

And the iconography performs the function of declaring or making an object pure, holy, or protected. And we've already covered two symbols that may be on it, the uraeus and the neket, but there's other symbols that can show up as well, like ox, jeds, nebs, a huge variety of symbols expressing different religious effects.

Now, we are now going to start applying some of that primer, finally. But one of the final concepts that we're going to need to talk about is iconographic intensification because it's going to be used in the Israelite tabernacle.

What we have here is that we've already discussed, sort of, in passing, that the Egyptians did not have just one kind of sacred space.

They had many kinds of sacred spaces. But they could also manipulate these sacred spaces to create subtle religious effects and had the conceptual framework to increase the size, decrease the size, do various sorts of manipulations with it.

[24 : 59] And this is one of their sort of big contributions to this manipulation of sacred space. Now, what we have here is a relief from Theban tomb 226.

This is Amarna period during the reign of Akhenaten. There's Akhenaten right in the center there. But what he's doing is he's sitting in a kiosk.

In fact, he's sitting in three kiosks. He's got one kiosk inside another kiosk, but inside another kiosk. But what's more interesting here is that each of these kiosks has uraeus friezes.

There's not just three uraeus friezes, there's five. There's a uraeus frieze on the bottom, there's one there, there's one there, there's one there, and there's one there.

You've got here a holy within a holy, within a holy, within a holy, within a holy. A holy of holies. So, this is going to become, now, remember the necobacter vulture?

[26 : 15] Keep that in mind. Exodus 26, 31-33. And you shall make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twisted linen, and it shall be made with cherubim, work of skillful craftsmen, and shall hang the veil from clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony there within the veil.

And the veil shall separate the holy place from the most holy place. The veils of the tabernacle were decorated with cherubim.

Cherubim are the analogous symbol to the necobacter vulture in Egyptian culture. Okay? So, what the cherubim do is they expand out their wings to create holy space.

So, what you have in the tabernacle is a curtain with cherubim. Inside of that, another curtain with cherubim. And inside of that, the ark of the covenant.

You're holy of holies. What's also very interesting to, besides the veil, because that is also, you know, we've already seen that on the sacred barks, but this twisted linen.

[27 : 27] And, just a brief comment on that. Now, the fact that it's linen isn't significant. Linen was used all over the ancient Near East. But what's interesting here is that the Hebrew text uses the word *sesh*, which is a, borrowed from, it's an Egyptian loan word, from the Egyptian *sesh*, and refers to a specific kind of linen.

So, they're using, the Israelites are using Egyptian materials in their construction of their tabernacle. Now, I'm going to talk about a couple other classes of ritual processional furniture.

The first, I'm going to, the next one I'm going to talk about is the chest, particularly henned chest. Now, when I did my research on ritual processional furniture, I discovered 24 types of chests used in ancient Egypt.

About 12 of those had ritual processional uses. We're only going to discuss a couple here, otherwise we would be here until Monday morning.

But the *hennu* is sort of your generic term for a chest. It can be used as a regular storage chest, but it can also have these ritual processional uses. And larger *hennu* chests could be equipped with carrying poles and with shrine-shaped lids.

[29 : 05] And this kind of chest, all the way back to the old kingdom. It's very, very old as far as its pedigree is concerned. It could also be used for holding sacred or precious items, such as gold, silver, and bronze, also for clean linens after purification, and for natron used in the mummification process.

But in some contexts, a hennu can have acted as a small shrine. According to Richard Wilkinson, it was used by the deceased to establish continued influence in earthly and heavenly spheres. But when it's used for this purpose, what we see is something very interesting, which is a statue is placed upon the lid. Now, in this particular relief from Medina Habu, dating to Ramses III, we have a chest here of Amun-Re.

So it is a full chest, you can put stuff in it, but it also has this statue on top. And there are scenes from certain tombs where the tomb owners are bowing and praying to one of these chests. So it could serve a votive function. One of the more interesting instances of a hennu chest is what is known as the hennu of Anubis.

[30 : 27] Now, this is the most famous example from the tomb of King Tut. However, the use of these Anubis shrines was not restricted to royalty, released to appear in several Ramessai tombs.

And the purpose of these chests was to hold canopic jars. And a canopic jar is a jar that was used to hold the internal organs after mummification.

So there would be four of these. But we find a relief in the tomb of Pedneed of Dynasty 26 where it actually shows one of these chests with the jars in it.

So we've got confirmation that that's what it was used for. And furthermore, the hennu of Anubis was often part of a title that was owned by certain hemnure priests.

And it was a very important title. Those who held the title just sort of gushed over it. Because this was big status apparently.

[31 : 33] But while the reliefs of these on tombs is very common, the material culture finds of these are extremely rare. We only have recovered two of these from all of Egypt.

One from King Tut, the other from a queen. Now, the fact that we find very few of these and lots of canopic chests, calcite canopic chests, those are very common.

That's a big mystery. But I think a partial answer to this comes from the furniture of Tutankhamen. Tutankhamen had the Anubis shrine, but his canopic jars were actually stored in a real canopic chest.

This is a chest, and there you can see the Uraeus freezes again, again, holy within a holy, and inside there would have been a calcite chest that held his canopic jars.

But it does sort of beg the question, why would you need both if you only have one set of internal organs? chest? Okay? And that question brings us to an entirely different kind of chest called a parincecha.

[32 : 58] Now, we don't have any pictures of a parincecha, unfortunately. But what we do have is perhaps the most detailed description of a ritual chest from ancient Egypt, thanks largely to the scribal depositions recorded during the tomb robberies incident of Dynasty 20, roughly about 1078, 1079 BC.

From the British Museum Papyrus 100403, we know that the parincecha could belong to either a king or priests.

And they were kept in the treasury at the memorial temple at Medina Habu. Now, this is highly significant because while gray furniture might have been kept at Medina Habu, which was the memorial temple of Ramses III, rather than kept there for the benefit of a king, keeping furniture there for the benefit of a priest, even a high priest, does not, it seems like a very unlikely courtesy. This means that the parincecha seems to have had a ritual processional use that meant that its storage at Medina Habu was the normal thing to do.

And Papyrus Bridge Museum 10403 and Papyrus Meyer A leave us a description of the parincecha. We know that the parincecha that belonged to the priest Ramzi Snacht had six pole ends, which is, a pole has two ends, so three full-length poles.

[34 : 37] The items that used poles for strictly utilitarian purposes, let's say you just wanted to lift something up. Even the most heaviest object in Egypt only used two poles. If all you were doing was carrying it just for weight, all they did was make the poles bigger.

But if it had more than two poles, then it served a completely different purpose, which was to pack people around it so you could do a really, really impressive parade. In fact, one of the

augmentations that kings would do later for sacred barks is they would brag about, oh, I added an extra pole to the bark of Amun Ray.

So they're framing this arc around with 12 poles and 60 people, you know, just to make a big show. But that's important to the ancient Egyptians, because more people means more status.

Okay? So, you know, kind of like today, go to a political rally, you don't see two people in the audience, you hope. You see hundreds of people, the bigger the crowd, the more important the person on the stage.

They'll truck people in from the suburbs just to make it a big show. Egyptians did the same thing. You know, there's nothing new under the sun. So, it wasn't uncommon for like sacred barks or ritual processional furniture to have four, six, or even eight pole ends.

[36 : 09] The point is to make that big show. Now, British Museum 10403 has also shown us something else, that the parents' set was synonymous with a piece of furniture called a shefedia.

Now, unfortunately, the only picture we have of a shefedia comes from a middle kingdom context, which is here the tomb of Antef Ochre. And what it clearly is, it's a coffin.

Okay? Now, the context changes in the new kingdom. By the new kingdom, the shefedia is no longer referred to as a coffin, but becomes a funerary bier, used to carry the dead, from the place of mummification to the tomb.

So, when we take together the facts of the Anubis shrine, the parents set of Ramzi's Noct, what we see is an interesting phenomenon of communal furnishings. In both cases, these furnishings were not interred with the dead.

They were reused by family groups and potentially the entire community, and administered by a special type of priest. The purpose of this furniture seems to be to ritually cleanse or bless the dead on the sacred journey to the tomb.

[37 : 35] So, then, the overarching purpose of all ritual processional furniture, whether it's for funerals, for temples, is to bless the contents of the container so as to make the contents suitable for religious purposes.

these containers appear to be activated by some ceremony, the opening of the mouth ceremony, for example, and the sacred journey effectualizes transformation elicited by the iconography.

Now, that's a big explanation. Let me put this in a way that's really easy to understand. I'm going to tell you a story. You're all fig farmers. Okay?

Can you pretend you're all fig farmers for a moment? You go, you're not your figs, you're making these gorgeous, beautiful, yummy figs. Okay? Well, it's harvest time, you pick your figs, and they're just off.

They're the best figs you've ever had. And you decide, okay, I have been so blessed by Amun Ray today that I am going to take a bag of these figs, and I'm going to go to the temple, and I'm going to put my figs in front of the bark of Amun Ray, and say, Amun Ray, I'm dedicating, as an offering, these lovely figs to you.

[38 : 51] So, you pack up your stuff, you get on your donkey, and you ride to the temple, you get off, you take your bag of figs, and you go to the pylon. And then some big priest says, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, where are you going with those figs?

And you say, well, I've got these gorgeous, wonderful figs, I just want to give them to Amun Ray.

Oh, no, no, no, no, no, you're not coming in here with those figs.

You're profane, your figs are profane, there's no way that those figs are setting foot in this temple.

And I've got 20 guards with spears behind me that are not going to let you come in.

because your figs and you are profane. You can't come in. And you're so broken hearted at this point. It's like, oh my gosh, these figs aren't the best.

I've never seen figs like these. How am I going to get them into the temple? And the priest goes, well, you know what? I know a guy who knows a guy. And I can help you out.

[39 : 56] So the priest calls his friends and you see these priests and they're coming out of the temple with this box on poles and it has a ray of freeze around it.

And they're chanting wah, wah, wah. And they set down this box in front of you. They open the lid.

They say a prayer over the figs. They pick up the figs. They put it in the box. They put the lid on the box. They lift up the box. And the lector priest does some spells.

And they're chanting and going back in. Wah, wah. And then they walk up to the plinth and the sacred bark of Ammon Rae. They put down that box.

They open the lid. And they pull out sacred figs. Okay? You see what just happened? The ceremony, the box, the spells, all of that together, ritually converted those figs from sacred figs, from profane figs to sacred figs.

[41 : 07] And then they all went and snacked on figs. But that is how ritual processional furniture works.

They're ritualizing converters. They convert things from profane to sacred. sacred. So now that you have an understanding of how ritual processional furniture works in the Egyptian context, we can see now ways that RPF compares to, say, the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, here we go again. from British Museum 10403, the Perin Setia was constructed as a wood box.

And as we said, six pole ends with rings of bronze. The whole thing was covered with bronze inside and out. And that bronze during the tomb robberies incident was ripped off and melted because bronze was valuable.

But we can compare that description directly to the tabernacle furniture. Exodus 25, 10, and 11. And they shall construct an arc of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high.

[42 : 29] And you shall overlay it with pure gold inside and out. You shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. An even closer example to the Perin Setia is actually the burnt offering, the altar of burnt offering, Exodus 27.

You shall make an altar of acacia wood, and you shall overlay it with bronze. Now, what's interesting about this is this is a distinctly Egyptian designed pattern.

You don't find this across the ancient Near East. This is coming right out of Egypt. When the Israelites actually enter into the promised land, they stop constructing things this way.

In fact, this will be the only time that they will construct metal over wood in their whole history. We see in Joshua 8:31, as soon as they enter into the Holy Land, they start making altars out of stone.

That's Levantine construction. But this here, what we're seeing here, is New Kingdom construction. New Kingdom Egyptian construction. Now, another piece of ritual processional furniture we're going to look at is thrones.

[43 : 47] Now, thrones of sacred objects extend far back into Egyptian antiquity, as both the seats of gods and kings. And there is every indication that the religious symbolism on the thrones also extended back to the earliest dynasties, although not normally as processional objects.

during the Amarna period, Akhenaten cut off the endowments to the temples of Egypt. Without the endowments, the temples did not receive grain, sacrifices were not made, and priests were out of work.

But the temples were forced to close, and the procession of the sacred barks ceased. Now, without a visible sign of divinity for the public, a crisis of symbol ensued.

The theology of Akhenaten was that there was no god but Aten, and Akhenaten was his only son.

To understand the significance of this theology, I paraphrase James Hoffmeyer, quote, the son of a king is a king, the son of a god is a god, end quote.

This fine point was not lost on Akhenaten. To compensate for the crisis of symbol, Akhenaten continued an innovation from his father Amenhotep III, which we'll call portable sacred thrones, sort of a new kind of palanquin.

[45 : 11] Now, palanquins are not in themselves new to Egypt. They have been used extensively since the old kingdom by anyone who could afford them.

Both a royalty and the wealthy used them. And they initially did not carry any religious significance whatsoever. In fact, this one here comes from the tomb of Queen Hepat Harris.

She was the wife of King Senefru and the mother of King Khufu, who built the great pyramid of Giza. But this palanquin is made of wood, it's covered in gold foil, so Egyptian design pattern, but it also is very interesting in that it has no religious symbols on it at all.

It is stark bare of iconography. But what we see later starting in the Amarna period is the palanquin takes on a radical design change.

The portable sacred throne borrows heavily from the iconography of sacred barks. So much so that the portable sacred throne becomes an object of sacred space that during Akhenaten's lifetime replaced sacred barks as the focus for ritual procession.

[46 : 28] So he becomes the center of the religious procession. Going forward from the Amarna period, the use of this new palanquin design was used on both processional sacred thrones and the cult statues of kings.

And when the old religion was restored by Tutankhamen, the procession of portable sacred thrones and sacred barks were used side by side until the end of the new kingdom.

Now in this relief from Adina Habu, we see the king here seated on the throne. On the sides of the thrones we have the royal symbols of the lion and the royal sphinx.

But we also see new iconography that's been added, which is these Ma'at goddesses, two of them, there's a pair of them there, with their wings around the throne.

unlike sacred barks, where most of the sacred space is concealed inside shrines and under veils, here the most sacred space is actually upon the throne, open for everyone to see.

[47 : 43] The king sits in the midst of the sacred space in the place of a god. And we find that this symbol is restricted between the reigns of Akhenaten until Harry Hoar, a period roughly 1350 until 1069 BC.

So it's got a very, very specific archaeological context. Now, the Ark of the Covenant as ritual processional furniture is a special case, even amongst the tabernacle furnishing.

It was clearly used for ritual. I mean, there's not even any doubt that it was used for ritual. But it was also used for procession.

Joshua 3, 17, and 1 Samuel 4, 4 to 5. Furthermore, it is the only piece of tabernacle furniture that has its poles attached to the feet.

Exodus 25, 12, you shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet. Two rings on one side of it and two rings on the other. With the other three boxes, three pieces of tabernacle furniture, the rings were attached to the sides of the box, meaning the upper half.

[49 : 10] The Ark was clearly meant to be seen when on parade. The iconography of the Ark of the Covenant bears strong similarities to Egyptian Ark P.

If, like the portable throne, the most important sacred space with the Ark is not inside the box, but, oops, but above the box, between the wings of the cherubim.

And there has also been some debate whether the cherubim are winged humans or winged lions. Based upon the iconography of the period, if the wings faced forward, then the representation is probably a winged human.

If the wings are swept back, then it will probably be a lion. Exodus 25, And you shall make two cherubim of gold and have them of hammer work at the two ends of the mercy seat, and make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other.

You shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends, i.e. they're not detachable. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and facing one another, the face of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat.

[50 : 25] So they're facing into each other, wings swept forward. So according to the iconography of the period, we can expect that to be winged humans. But there's also something very interesting and unusual that happens in the Ark narrative, which is it undergoes a name change like what we see with the patriarchs.

For example, Abraham's name is changed to Abram, Jacob's name is changed to Israel. Now, such name changes occur when there's a life-changing encounter with God.

That's usually when this happens. But this is the only instance that I know of in the whole Bible where this actually happens to an object. I can name no other example where this happens to an object in all the Bible.

So this is sort of unique. But what we find here is that the Ark was originally called the Ark of the Testimony. And the word for testimony is a *du*.

And it's interesting because it's actually a Semitic word that comes into the Egyptian language.

Okay? Whenever you get these two cultures intermixing, you get borrowing in both directions, not just one.

[51 : 53] You know, the old Monty Python script. What did the Romans ever do for us? Well, they built roads. What besides roads? They built aqueducts. What besides roads and aqueducts?

And the list goes on. Because cultures borrow from each other. And that's what we find here is the Egyptians will borrow this word *edut* and use it to mean conspiracy.

And it appears in the Herod conspiracy papyrus that dates to early Romseys IV. By the way, it's the same papyrus where Romseys III is documented having been assassinated.

but this is a very interesting name change because it infers something else. The old moniker of the Ark of the Testimony ends midway through the book of Numbers.

It is used consistently in Exodus and Leviticus and up to Numbers chapter 9, specifically 9:18. And the pivotal event seems to be when the Shekinah glory of God hovers over the tabernacle.

[53 : 07] But what this also does for us is it implies that the Pentateuch was written in chronological order.

Because it is written Ark of the Testimony right in Numbers 9 and there's Ark of the Covenant of the Lord after that. And the only time we ever see the Ark of the Testimony used again in the entire Bible is one instance in Joshua, where right after it's repeated the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.

So that's very interesting and very telling right there. Now finally, one last note about the mercy seat. The ancient Hebrew word for Ark is a ron, which is an Akkadian word, a ranu.

And it means a box, chest, or coffin. And this is not enlightening on its own, given that Hebrew is a Semitic language derived from Akkadian. But a less tractable word is the mercy seat, keperet.

There's both an etymological and a translational problem. Now, the translational problem is that mercy seat is not a translation, but a theological construct.

[54 : 29] It comes from the German Ganad and Stuhl, which Wycliffe and Luther translated from the Greek Ilustarian. It is an attempt to blend the concept of propitiation and a throne.

And modern translations, some modern translations will use the translation propitiation instead, which is actually not any more helpful. But it is regrettable that mercy seat has become the common English rendering.

There is also an etymological problem, which is in the Akkadian, the etymology of kaparu, which means to propitiate or smear, is only used as a verb or adverb.

There isn't a substantival version of this in the ancient languages. So, when we find it substantivalized here, it doesn't actually make a lot of sense to say, put the smear on top of the box. Because that's how the text is treating this. Take the mercy seat and place it on top of the ark. Well, take the smear and put it on top of the ark. That's a problem.

[55 : 45] Now, there is also an alternative, though, which I'm going to introduce to you here. In Egyptian, there's a word, kapah, which, given late Egyptians' tendency to transform and drop final Rs, could be a very good fit here.

It is a fit that makes translational sense, since it means a lid. And that is particularly a lid that is used with coffins. You've got a rome that means a box or coffin.

You've got a lid that means a lid, potentially, to a coffin. It makes good translational sense.

Theologians will hate this for generations to come. In conclusion, we have looked at the religious context of ancient Egyptian RPF as vessels of sacred space and ritual transformation.

And when the Egyptian cultural context is compared to the description that we have of the Ark, the data suggests that the Ark fits a context no earlier than the Amarna period and no later than the end of Dynasty 20.

the Ark is an ideal fit as ritual processional furniture and follows a strict Egyptian design pattern.

And when asked, what is the Ark?

[57 : 00] Is it a box? Is it a coffin? Is it a throne? Well, it's all of these. The fact is, it comes out of a period when the Egyptians were deconstructing their furniture to fit many contexts and many uses.

And the Ark of the Covenant reflects that deconstruction. So it's not just one thing, it's everything. It's a box, it's a coffin, it's a throne, it's a reliquary.

The Hebrew account also presents us with loan words that would not have been part of, say, a much later context. So even the vocabulary points to Israelites' emergence out of Egypt as a viable story.

And finally, we can say that there is much to be had from the study of the Ark and ritual processional furniture if we move beyond allegory and myth and beyond Indiana Jones.

Thank you. I hope that made some reasonable sense.

[58 : 11] Yes? I had a question just about primacy. You'll hear people, for example, talk about unbelievers saying, well, Jesus is just, there were these kinds of myths before, of virgins burying children, and half God, half man, and these kinds of images.

And Christianity is just kind of a hodgepodge putting together all of these things they're borrowing from previous traditions. And people make those cases. And a lot of what you said here is very fascinating.

And to me, I've always thought about these things more in counterfeit ways. Like, Satan had access to the throne room of God, we hear, and Job.

do you think that there's anything to the possibility that he, in revealing certain heavenly things to the Egyptians, not in the fullness that God would reveal, that he was counterfeiting the reality, and now God was correcting.

And that that's, I mean, they were coming out of Egypt. So instead of the Hebrews kind of borrowing from the Egyptians, God is correcting and bringing to fullness what was only groped at or grasped at in part through the counterfeits.

[59 : 21] What are your thoughts on that? My thoughts on that was more along the lines that not so much that the Egyptians had counterfeits, because they did have counterfeits, but they also had glimmers of the truth.

Yes, that's right. It's, let me put it this way, it's hard to be 100% correct as much as it is to be 100% wrong. Okay? It's, it's one of these things where if God is trying to take his people out of, out of, out of Egypt, he's going to use what is most familiar to them.

He's not going to say to them, get into your automobiles and take the I-40 out of Egypt. Okay?

They're going to go, what's an I-40, what's an automobile, and what's a drive?

You know, God is going to use things that are in the culture that are familiar. And they're going to take those symbols, and they're going to put their own meanings to them.

Because that's what religions do. They, they borrow from ideas, from a pool of ideas, they make it their own, and they put those ideas back into the pool.

[60 : 34] Okay? It's not as simple as saying it's just a counterfeit, or it is just a, a, a, a deception. It's much more nuanced than that.

No, I, I realize that. I didn't mean to, um, I was, I was trying to be nuanced by saying that they were seeing in part. I'm just saying that it seems to be more of an anthropocentric kind of approach that you're taking, that it really is the, the man, God is sort of condescending, if you will, to man.

Well, I think, I think it's very much God condescending to man. Sure, but, but he's taking things that were put there. What, I guess my question really is what's the primary?

Isn't it God's creation is primary? They're taking the partial revelation. There's cloudiness there.

There's, there's confusion there. And now he's bringing clarity is what I'm saying.

And yes, he's using things that are familiar to them, but it was familiar to them because we're all created in his image and we all would have been descended from Adam and you know what I'm saying. So there's a common story they're sharing.

[61 : 34] Well, I think, I think, I think the two, I don't think the two views are incompatible. Okay.

Okay? I think, I think you could have both a condescension to man and a primacy of God.

I don't think the two are incompatible at all. Okay. I'm just intrigued. That's all. Thank you so much for this. Oh, no, no, no. I'm not sure you have any questions, but I'm fascinated by two things.

In music, we know, for instance, of these silver trumpets that were specified by our Lord, by God, for the Tabernacle, were in fact already in existence. Yes, they were.

Tutankhamen found two of those silver trumpets. Ah, right. I don't know much about this area, but I do know that one difference would have been they wouldn't have been adorned specifically, consciously, would not have been adorned in the way that their surrounding godless nations would have been adorned.

Yes. And the other thing that struck me was that temple layout just in concert with, say, pre-reformation churches or a Catholic view, I want to be careful because I don't know about it, a place for the congregation, a chancel where sacred things happen, and then, what I was brought up with, even as an applicant, the holy of holies is that altar rail, built beyond that, and a very high church would probably wear sanctuary circuits.

[62 : 56] Yep. It's amazing how these patterns repeat, isn't it? Yes, that's the thing, that's all I'm saying, I'm just intrigued by that. David, this is so great to hear this, almost too much to absorb.

I know, I'm so sorry. Why do the Ethiopian Coptic Christians believe they are the Ark of the Covenant? Because of the tale of the Kebren Aghast.

What was the, I'll explain, I'll explain. In the 13th century AD, the kingdom of Ethiopia was failing.

It was falling apart around its feet. And in order to try to sort of hold itself all together, it came up with these sort of tales that the apostles and the church fathers were all supporting them. And they sort of just kind of ahistorically threw whatever mishmash they could together to give the reign legitimacy. Now, the Ethiopian church still calls their offering tables, arcs.

[64 : 09] But they don't look anything like the Ark of the Covenant. What they are is essentially a table with four legs. And it's not even a very high table. So, unfortunately, that has been leveraged in a way that it probably never was intended to.

So the idea that the people there are descended, or the rulers are descended from a child of Solomon and Sheba.

It is total mythology. Yeah. Because I'll tell you what, because Sheba was not married to Solomon. No. She was married to the king of Sabah, which was a kingdom in the Arabian Peninsula.

And what you had there was she was a diplomatic envoy. Not a queen. She was a queen, but she was a diplomatic envoy. There was no sort of hanky-panky between Swaliman and Sheba.

Yes? So, in your discussion of the preliminaries, you showed us the allegory group of people.

Those were all black and white photos of people, I think, who were some while ago.

[65 : 25] In general, in scholarship, what would the sort of normal view of liberal Christians be now about the existence of the power of communism? Oh, it's still a myth. It's still a myth.

To your word. Yes. So, your thing? I'm not a liberal Christian. Are you engaged in dialogue with those people or controversially? Well, the problem is I don't really have dialogue with those people because there's really not sort of detente.

Okay? They're convinced it's myth. There's really no room for dialogue at the moment. We can always be hopeful. Yes, right.

And we always keep praying for them. But they more or less have an atheist point of view. That's interesting when you mentioned some of the etymology of some of the Egyptian words are Hebrew and when people visit, they adopt words.

I wonder how many Egyptian words of Hebrew origin are in the Egyptian language? There's a fair number of them. There's a fair number of Semitic words in the Egyptian language.

[66 : 39] James Hawk produced a very large dictionary just of Semitic loan words in Egyptian. So there's actually a fair number. In fact, it's a Hamido-Semitic language because of its combination.

I was wondering if the word for lid to coffin, you said it was a kapah. One of the names for a yarmulke is a kippah.

Yeah, it's not related, but it is sort of because it's a covering. Yes? I was looking at some of the Old Testament writings about the Ark of the Covenant, and one thing that really jumped out at me was the poles that were carried into the Ark, were removable, but they were never to be removed.

Exactly. Because they're part of the whole sacred furnishing. Yeah, it's very interesting. They were removable, you're right, but they were forbidden to be removed.

So why were they removable? Well, my suspicion is because here's the thing. You had to get that into the space of the tabernacle.

[67 : 52] it's a space issue. So in order to get it in there and then close the curtain, you had to move the poles. But you couldn't say store the poles elsewhere.

They had to be stored nearby. Is there a word for an animal that comes and closes things? Okay! I know there's lots of wonderful questions, and David will be here I think for a few minutes afterwards, but I just know that we have the logistics of getting the tables set up and things.

I want to take this opportunity to thank David Clark. Thank you. Thank you.