# Ark-Eology: Shifting Emphases in 'Ark Narrative' Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

A central character in 1 Samuel 4–6 is the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark is captured in battle, and subsequently wreaks havoc throughout the land of the Philistines until its subsequent return to the borders of Israel. Commonly referred to as the 'Ark Narrative' in scholarly literature, 1 Samuel 4–6 has often been viewed as a separate unit within the larger Deuteronomistic History. Although the Ark Narrative has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest, the methodological foci of such studies appear to have undergone a shift in more recent times. While earlier studies espoused a host of different critical approaches, such as tradition-historical, form-critical and redactional methodologies, it would seem that more recent studies have exhibited greater interest in literary appraisal and narrative criticism. This article presents a summary of recent research on the Ark Narrative of 1 Samuel 4–6 by 12 scholars: Robert Gordon, Lyle Eslinger, Peter Miscall, Walter Brueggemann, Yehoshua Gitay, Robert Polzin, J.P. Fokkelman, Bruce Birch, E.M.M. Eynikel, Graeme Auld, Barbara Green and Antony F. Campbell, SJ.

## *Introduction*

A brief survey of secondary literature over the past two decades reveals a discernible shift in studies of the Ark Narrative of 1 Samuel 4–6. Not so long ago, there was widespread agreement that this material constituted a thoroughly independent entity, and represented one of the oldest theological narratives in the Old Testament. In more recent times, however, a skeptical consciousness has emerged, arguing that there never was an

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independent Ark Narrative. While, by any measure, many a scholarly edifice has been crumbling in our times, this nevertheless represents a rather dramatic point of departure. The reasons for these shifting paradigms in the study of the Ark Narrative are no doubt complex and variegated, and are, in any case, beyond the scope of this survey of recent research. The results of such analyses, however, are easier to quantify. This article will discuss a number of more recent studies of the Ark Narrative and explore the shifting emphases of scholarly engagement with this material. To that end, in good tribal fashion, I have chosen a sample of 12 readers of the lost Ark, and focus on their efforts to understand 1 Samuel 4–6 as part of its broader literary context. The interest here is not so much on critical evaluation; rather, I have compiled a series of comments from each of these readers. I will conclude with several summary points and observations on any discernible trends, and propose some potential directions for future research.

## 1. *Robert Gordon*

A useful point of commencement is Robert Gordon's *1 & 2 Samuel* volume in Sheffield's Old Testament Guides series (1984). While his treatment of the Ark Narrative is not overly long, it is written with characteristic good sense, and refers to most of the salient issues. His discussion is divided into two parts: definition, where he comments on source-critical matters and scholarly debate; and theme, focusing on the narrative of 1 Samuel 4–6 itself. Gordon begins by summarizing the contribution of Rost (1926), and then provides assessments of several monographs such as *The Ark Narrative* by Campbell (1975) and *The Hand of the Lord* by Miller and Roberts (1977). Gordon raises matters of provenance (that is, source and date of origin, as well as possible reasons for its composition in the first place), as well as the issue of 2 Samuel 6 as the logical conclusion to the Ark Narrative (that is, questions regarding whether the story ends in 2 Samuel 6, and if so, how one resolves the Kiriath-jearim [1 Sam. 6.21–7.2]/Baale-Judah [2 Sam. 6.1] discrepancy—if in fact there is a discrepancy). Gordon also critiques Miller and Roberts's 'expansion' of the story by prefixing the anti-Elide portions of ch. 2 (vv. 12-17, 22-25, 27-36) to ch. 4 as the beginning of the Ark Narrative.

His appraisal of the debate over the limits and extent of the text is succinct: 'the lineaments of the "Ark Narrative," if it ever existed, have yet to be restored with a proper degree of exactitude' (1984: 34). So, when

Gordon then turns to theme, he hastens to add that his discussion of theme is not predicated on whether or not one accepts the Ark Narrative hypothesis. Gordon concentrates on the spatial setting for 1 Samuel 4–6, and Israel's ongoing rivalry with the Philistines. This rivalry occurs on two levels. On one level, there is the struggle for land between recent arrivals with competing territorial claims. On the other level, there is the socio-religious conflict, as the Philistines represent a policy of assimilation and acculturation. Such mimetic tendencies also include the sphere of religious devotion and practice. For Israel, the Philistines represent more than just military opposition, and hence Gordon argues that the ideological nature of the conflict in the Ark Narrative is primary:

> The ark is brought to Ashdod and placed in the presence of Dagon, supposedly the victorious god, and, all unbeknown to the Philistines, the scene is set for the contest proper to begin. The judgment on Dagon as the representative god of Philistia happens at night (cf. Exod. 12:12), and is in two stages, as if to correspond to the twin defeats of Israel at Ebenezer. Now, in a striking reversal of roles, Dagon is prostrated before the ark, a hapless torso. Hereafter there is no talk of the gods of Philistia; even Philistine priests are made to speak like Hebrew prophets (6:6) (1984: 36).

## 2. *Lyle Eslinger*

Lyle Eslinger's monograph, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1–12*, questions many generic assumptions, and, alternatively, pays attention to final form by utilizing a narratological methodology (1985). Eslinger challenges many source-critical conjectures, and draws on a number of literary theoreticians (including Iser [1978: 44], Perry [1978: 48-50], Sternberg [1985: 50], Chatman [1978: 41], among others) to inform his analysis.

> An interpretation produced by close reading will follow the order of presentation given in the text, noting along the way the various contributions of linguistic and literary devices to the developing meaning of the text. At the same time, the close reading of any biblical text must be carried out in the light of previous historical-critical readings of the text. We have been cued to the tensions, doublets and varying points of view and their location in the narrative by historical criticism. A close reading will have to describe the contextual role of such phenomena if the hypothesis that the narrative can be read as a unity is to be maintained (1985: 42).

When he turns to 1 Samuel 4–6, Eslinger does not allocate space to define the Ark Narrative, or to evaluate the scholarly debate. Instead, he immediately proceeds with his close reading, beginning at the end of ch. 3. His study proffers a host of interesting text-critical and literary insights, and I will summarize his contribution by drawing attention to three different kinds of observations: intertextual, text-critical and literary.

First, on the intertextual side, Eslinger compiles a list of connections between 1 Sam. 3.2-18 and 4.12-18 as an illustration of his method, and as an attempt to read ch. 4 (the first unit of the Ark Narrative) as a continuation of the previous episodes. 'The literary links between 4.12-18 and 3.2-18 confirm that the defeats are Yahweh's doing as he goes about punishing the Elides' (1985: 176):

| | |
|---|---|
| 3.2 Eli lies in his place | 4.13 Eli sits in a chair |
| 3.2 Eli cannot see | 4.15 Eli cannot see |
| 3.4 God begins to call Samuel, announcing what he is about to do (the 'ear-tingling' event) | 4.10-11 Israel is defeated |
| 3.5 Samuel runs (toward Eli) | 4.12 A Benjaminite runs (toward Eli) |
| 3.11-14 Eli is not privy to the divine vision because he is 'blind' | 4.14-15 Eli does not know what has happened because he is 'blind' |
| 3.16-17 Eli asks Samuel 'what is the word?' | 4.16 Eli asks the messenger 'what is the word?' |
| 3.18 Samuel tells what will happen | 4.14 The messenger tells what has happened |
| 3.18 Contents of Samuel's message (including what the LORD had previously said in 2.27-36 according to 3.12) | 4.17 Content of message: Israel fled, great losses, Eli's sons dead, and the ark taken. |

A pattern therefore emerges: the prophetic word, and its fulfilment. This pattern, Eslinger notes, will continue throughout the wider narrative of Samuel-Kings.

Second, Eslinger raises an interesting textual point pertaining to the matter of mice and men, and the strange appearance of rodents in ch. 6, an image without antecedent in the Masoretic Text. The issue is that the mice appear in the LXX as early as 5.6 (cf. 6.1). He notes, 'The intro-

duction of the mice at this point has proved troublesome to scholars, who have offered various literary-critical explanations. Hertzberg suggests that the mice are a natural cause for the plague and hence their appearance is contrary to the purpose of divine glorification in the narrative (1964: 58; cf. Stoebe 1973: 151)' (1985: 206). Eslinger points out that even Miller and Roberts concede that there is no known, exact ancient Near Eastern parallel to the making of golden tumors and mice, but this begs the question as to the reason for the first appearance of the rodents occurring at this point in the narrative. His solution is one of elegant simplicity: 'it is a further reflection of the Philistine priests' human uncertainty about the causes and meanings of the plague'. Eslinger concludes:

> The mice need no explicit introduction in the previous narrative; their introduction here, as the product of Philistine uncertainty, is another instance in a continuing series of situations where [the human actors are] not certain how to respond to Israel's God's intervention in human affairs (1985: 206).

My point is not the plausibility of this solution, but rather that it represents an example of Eslinger's consistent eschewing of emendation before attempting to make sense of the received Hebrew text.

Third, Eslinger comments on an interesting literary detail at 6.14: 'As the wagon came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, there it stopped, and there was a great stone.' He notes, 'The reader, well aware that carts are without volition, will no doubt see the hand of Yahweh at the reins of the cart' (1985: 214). Hence, where the cart stops may be of significance, and thus Eslinger comments on the name 'Joshua' in this context:

> The name of Joshua, the man in whose field the cart stops, recalls another more famous character who was chosen to lead Israel into the promised land when Moses was barred entry (cf. Num 20,12; Josh 1). Once again an allusion to the exodus story is used to indicate the significance of these events. In this particular example, the ark's passage onto Israelite soil in the field of a certain Joshua recalls Israel's own entry into the land under leadership of another Joshua. From the perspective of Israel's history, the return of the Ark into Joshua's field after the destruction of Israel's polity in ch. 4 would seem a perfect portent for the renewal of that selfsame polity (1985: 215).

One may deduce from this that the exodus portion of the Ark's tour is now complete, and the name 'Joshua' symbolizes the Ark's re-entry into the promised land.

### 3. *Peter Miscall*

In his 'literary reading' of the entire book of 1 Samuel, Peter Miscall acknowledges the scholarly construct of an independent Ark Narrative, but prefers to 'deal with it as an integral part of the context' (1986: 26). Miscall's strength, as has been noted (e.g. Polzin 1993: 240; Mullen 1993: 189) is presenting connections with other aspects of the narrative, both on a more local level, and within the wider narrative framework of Genesis–Kings. As an example, consider one of his musings on 1 Samuel 4. Chapter 4 has two main components: the battle, and the subsequent report in the city. In terms of individuals, the second half of the chapter focuses on Eli and his family. Miscall comments at length on the word-play involving כבד (glory/heavy), but the detail of Eli's old age is also important, as it recalls the prophecy of the itinerant man of God in 2.31-33, 'there will not be an old man in your house…but not every man will be cut off…' Since, at the end of ch. 4, there is a survivor in Eli's house, this information takes on a new importance. The death of Eli's daughter-in-law in the final moments of this chapter provides a deeper meaning to the identity of the messenger at the midway point: 'a man of Benjamin'. In light of another 'man of Benjamin' whom the reader will meet in 1 Samuel (Saul), and other allusions to Benjamin's mother Rachel in 1 Samuel (cf. Jobling 1998: 190), Miscall hints that there is a connection between the birth of Benjamin in Genesis 35, and the birth of Ichabod here in 1 Samuel 4:

> Not everyone in the house of Eli dies. Eli's death is framed by stories about his children—two sons and a daughter die, but a grandson, Ichabod, is born. Ichabod brings ambiguity with him, or, better, he adds to the ambiguity attached to the messenger from the battle lines, who is a man of Benjamin. Benjamin's birth is akin to Ichabod's, since his mother Rachel dies giving him birth (Gen. 35:16-20). In Benjamin's case, there is an equivocation on his name and an attempted clarification. 'As her life was departing (for she died), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called his name Benjamin' (Gen. 35:18) (1986: 29).

### 4. *Walter Brueggemann*

Notwithstanding Walter Brueggemann's recent treatment of the Ark Narrative in his book *Ichabod Toward Home* (2002), which addresses contemporary application, I will focus on his earlier *First and Second Samuel* commentary in the Interpretation series (1990), since it focuses on the

essential elements of the text. As one might expect, the majority of Brueggemann's focus in this commentary is on the various theological contours of the Ark Narrative. He pauses to acknowledge that 1 Sam. 4.1b–7.1 is 'commonly reckoned by scholars to be a coherent and distinctive narrative unit', but then he moves on to other matters (1990: 28).

> The task of interpretation will be to make this working of Yahweh dramatically available, without siphoning off the inscrutable and odd action of Yahweh into more cogent or 'reasonable' forms. That is, the casting of the narrative does not invite us to an explanation of the action but to an awed silence before the one who is inexplicable, inscrutable, and finally irresistible (1990: 29).

I will summarize Brueggemann's contribution by selecting one of his main points on each of the three chapters of the Ark Narrative.

First, like most other commentators, Brueggemann reflects at length on the allusions in the text to Israel's Egyptian experience, and to the exodus model and memory. Drawing on the work of Timm (1966), Brueggemann presents an extended discussion on the various levels of Philistine perception and discourse in the first half of 1 Samuel 4, and on their understanding of the story and faith of Israel: 'Even these uncircumcised outsiders can discern the strange power at work in the life of Israel, a strange power enormously dangerous to, and recognized as such by, the outsider. The narrative employs the perception of the Philistine to confess faith in Yahweh' (1990: 31).

Second, Brueggemann remarks on a significant twist in the plot, as the captive Ark severely damages the formidable Philistine nation. By any measure, there is a certain oddness to the Ark's domination of the technologically superior Philistines, in that it runs directly counter to expectation. The reader, along with both Israel and the Philistines, is confounded: 'Yahweh is not explained by the character of Israel but acts freely and against the conventions of both peoples' (1990: 37). It is curious, therefore, that Israel's theological categories are used to understand the implications of 'Dagon without hands', with the irony that 'Yahweh has God's own hands and with those hands will judge and destroy in ways that astonish God's people and terrorize God's enemies' (1990: 38). The discomfiture of Dagon caused by the Ark's presence causes a shift in Philistine priority and, one might say, national policy: 'The narrative mocks the Philistines, because they can act only to save their city, no longer to control Israel' (1990: 38). While the Ark is on tour through Philistine territory, the Philistines do not engage in offensive hostilities

against Israel. There are no more appeals to Dagon as the Ark continues from Ashdod to Gath to Ekron throughout Philistine soil—power vs panic is probably an appropriate way to characterize ch. 5, and it represents a stunning reversal of ch. 4.

Third, Brueggemann remarks on the theology of 'the test' devised by the Philistine spiritual leaders. The return of the Ark is necessary—as is the ritual act to compensate for the terrible miscalculation—but there is uncertainty as to how best to proceed. The guilt offering is important, and gold is not an inappropriate gift, providing yet another allusion to the exodus model. (Speaking of models, Brueggemann fortunately does not pause to speculate on what a model of a golden hemorrhoid would look like.) Brueggemann observes, concerning the test conducted by the priests and diviners in 6.7-9: 'There may be an element of cunning in the Philistine arrangement. If the cart does not head back to Israel of its own volition, led only by Yahweh's power, the alleged and dreaded power of Yahweh may be a ruse, and the Philistines need not fear' (1990: 41). Hence, they set 'very long odds', and though they may be frightened, 'they still hope to see Yahweh exposed as a powerless god. Their strategy is to prevent Yahweh's demonstration of sovereignty' (1990: 41). The analogies with the Exodus narrative persist, but in a sense the Philistines act differently from Pharaoh in that they act in submission, a posture that is embodied as the 'modest' Ark procession marks the return from 'exile'. Brueggemann notes that this restoration anticipates the return from 'another exile' in Israel's story (1990: 43).

### 5. *Yehoshua Gitay*

In his 1992 article 'Reflections on the Poetics of the Samuel Narrative: The Question of the Ark Narrative', Yehoshua Gitay states that the 'conclusion, almost a consensus among the critics, is that the ark narrative is a self-contained story', but he then proceeds to inquire 'whether it is possible to remove the ark material from its present place' (1992: 221-22). Gitay argues that the Ark Narrative is inseparable from the rest of Samuel because, 'In short, the story of the Books of Samuel revolves around the ark' (1992: 225). To arrive at this conclusion, Gitay begins by reminding his readers of the 'elliptic' nature of biblical narrative, that is, 'a reference mentioned at a specific place may remain undeveloped, only to reappear later in its full sense. The narrator trusts the audience's familiarity with this literary technique' (1992: 222). Such an audience is not ruffled by the deployment of different kinds of literary expressions; on the contrary, the

audience may well expect a blending of various literary 'types' and still deem the narrative to be unified. If the modern 'distinction between myth and history is not shared by the peoples of antiquity', then it stands to reason that what might appear as a splicing of sources might actually be an intentional ordering of material. To this end, Gitay spends a considerable amount of time discussing the relationship between 'plot' and 'forms of expression', as well as definitions of unified narratives based on (primarily) Aristotelian categories. He asks:

> Is there a plot (story) which unites the Samuel narrative? As a matter of fact, the Books of Samuel are arranged in such a way that each part derives logically from the previous one. The plot may be outlined as follows: 1 Samuel 1 introduces a new character, i.e., Samuel. The call of Samuel as God's prophet is explained by the narrator as the result of the corruption of Eli's sons. The house of Eli must be replaced. However, the fall of Eli's leadership is linked to the fall of the holy place, Shiloh, narrated in the story of the ark. Now, the question is whether Samuel will establish himself as the new leader and succeed in establishing the new cultic center (replacing Shiloh). In fact, he does not succeed. He goes from place to place, erecting a local altar only in his home, Ramah (7:16-17), while the ark itself lies neglected in Kiriath-jearim (1992: 224-25).

And so the narrative continues. For Gitay, then, the Ark Narrative is an essential component of the entire plot, and 'the function of the story is to answer the question of how the house of Eli fell, and how Shiloh, the old sanctuary, ceased to be God's residence' (1992: 230).

### 6. *Robert Polzin*

In his three-part literary study of the Deuteronomic History, Robert Polzin adds considerably to the aesthetic side of the critical ledger. The second volume, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, has a high degree of interaction with scholarly work in the field of biblical studies, and his treatment of the Ark Narrative is no exception (1993). In fact, he probably has more to say—in terms of critiquing traditio-historical and source-critical research methods and results—about 1 Samuel 4–6 than about any other narrative stretch. Polzin's discussion of the Ark Narrative occurs in two places in his book: his introduction (where he reviews past work, commencing with Rost, and laments what he perceives to be the excesses of excavative scholarship), and then in his commentary (where he is less concerned with matters of compositional history, and more concerned with 'the care

with which the ark narrative fits into its present context'). It is this latter discussion that is of interest for the present article. Polzin's question is:

> What are the compositional relationships (*compositional* in the poetic not genetic sense) between these stories of the ark and their immediate and remote context in the Deuteronomic History? Do the earlier ark narratives really interrupt material about Samuel's life and career, or vice versa? Or do they fit in with their immediate context in ways that make plausible suggestions of literary artistry and careful attention to detail? (1993: 55).

Since Polzin's major hermeneutical angle is the perspective of exile, he argues that the early chapters of 1 Samuel function as a parabolic overture to kingship in Israel. The Ark Narrative is included in this broader context of exile, and hence the importance of a summary comment like this:

> The space between the capture of the ark in 5:1 and its return in 6:21 contains many of the Deuteronomist's reflections on the nature of leadership in Israel. Improper leadership lost Israel the ark, and only a special kind of care on the part of its present custodians, the Philistines, will return it to its proper place. The Philistine experience with the ark contains programmatic reflections on Israel's hoped-for recovery of the land—and of the ark that had led them in the first place. Key to understanding these reflections continues to be the Deuteronomist's employment of 'the having of sons' as a metaphor for Israel's possessing a monarchy (1993: 66).

Two points should sufficiently illustrate the kind of reading of the Ark Narrative that Polzin undertakes. First, consider his observations of the various kinds of 'sensory perceptions' involved in ch. 4. His discussion of the preceding episode, ch. 3, draws attention to the gradually failing eyes of Eli: 'In what way does this description of Eli's weakening sight stand for Israel's diminishing insight about kingship?' (1993: 68-69). In response to this question, Polzin comments:

> If the parabolic prophecy of kingship's coming destruction is described as uttered at a time when 'the lamp of God had not yet gone out', how may this matter of dimming insight have royal implications? What had Eli/Israel lost sight of? As D.N. Freedman [acknowledged by McCarter 1980: 98] has already suggested, the weakening [כהות] of Eli's sight in v. 2 may somehow be related to Eli's failure to 'weaken [כהה]' his sons in v. 13 (1993: 54).

Hence, the reader is confronted with the memorable image of a blind Eli 'anxiously staring' as he awaits the outcome of battle. Polzin reflects:

> The paradoxical picture of a blind Eli keeping watch [מְצַפֶּה] by the road is emblematic of the entire chapter. Emphasis on the diminution of sight and light, found throughout chapter 3, continues in chapter 4, but in a different fashion. The language here revolves more around sound than around sight. The Philistines do not see the ark coming into the Israelite camp; rather they hear the noise of shouting 'when all Israel gave a mighty shout so that the earth resounded' (v. 5). 'What does this great shouting mean?' (v. 6), they ask. When the Israelites are told the news of the ark's capture, 'all the city cried out' (v. 13). When the messenger brings tidings (v. 17), Eli dies (v. 18). When his daughter-in-law hears the news, she gives birth and also dies (v. 19). Both the aural emphasis of this chapter and the figure of a blind Eli comment upon the events contained therein. Eli and the Israelites are blind to affairs, but so are the Philistines. Neither camp is said to understand, through any insightful sighting, what is happening to them, until chapter 5 when 'the men of Ashdod saw how things were' (5:6) and chapter 6 where emphasis on sight becomes ideologically significant (1993: 57).

Second, with regard to the *vocation* of the man of Benjamin who delivers the bad news of Israel's defeat to the city and to a peering Eli, Polzin has an extended discussion of the messenger as one who brings 'good news' (הַמְבַשֵּׂר). He notes that almost invariably when this root (בשׂר) occurs in the Deuteronomic History, it is in the context of someone bringing news that is, ultimately, *beneficial for the house of David*. For instance, when several other messengers bring 'good news', it usually accompanies the demise of someone threatening the Davidic or Solomonic kingship (e.g., Saul, Absalom and Adonijah); hence, the root בשׂר carries with it a larger thematic significance. The figure of Eli—whom Polzin suggests has royal overtones—is intricately 'tied into the coming account of kingship in the books of Samuel and beyond' (1993: 62). Immediately after receiving this 'good news' of the Ark's captivity (the Ark which David will eventually ensconce in Jerusalem), Eli falls over and breaks his neck. Polzin concludes:

> If chapters 1 to 7 form an overture to the entire monarchic history, the picture in 4:18 of Eli falling backward off his throne to his death is this overture's central event, the Deuteronomist's view of kingship in a nutshell. Eli represents all the burden and doom that kingship brought Israel. He had 'judged' Israel for forty years; that is to say, in the fullness of time kingship in Israel would disappear (1993: 64).

### 7. *J.P. Fokkelman*

J.P. Fokkelman's massive four-volume project covering the books of Samuel offers, as stated on the dust-jacket, 'a full interpretation based on stylistic and structural analyses', since 'Everything that the text has to offer can only be understood and appreciated to the full, and its interpretation can only lay claim to full validity by means of an integral view'. It is toward such an 'integral view' that Fokkelman devotes 2,441 pages. From the outset, one should note, Fokkelman rejects the notion of an independent Ark Narrative, and in his schematic organization of the text, chs. 1–4 form 'Act I', while chs. 5–7 form 'Act II'. He certainly argues for integral connections between the 'Acts', but his first quibble with the 'hypothesis of an original Ark Narrative' is on structural grounds. To delineate a succinct précis of the one hundred pages Fokkelman apportions to 1 Samuel 4–6 would take 40 days and 40 nights, neither of which are at my disposal during this present dispensation. Thus, I will set a more modest target and draw attention to two of his observations with respect to ch. 4.

The first observation pertains to 1 Sam. 4.4. The elders of Israel request that the Ark be brought on to the battlefield, 'Let's take for ourselves the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from Shiloh! Let it come into our midst, and it will rescue us from the grip of our enemies!' In response, 'the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim'. According to Fokkelman, the significance of this lengthy 'title' for the Ark represents 'a solemn moment and those concerned wish to give it its full importance, as part of the magical strategy, which must tempt God to decide the outcome'. His more interesting point, though, is that 'The full formula covers the point of view or the focalization of Israel. The word "hosts" reveals what they are hoping for: that a division of celestial beings will fight on their side until the inevitable victory follows' (1993: 203). If Fokkelman is correct, and this title indeed reflects the viewpoints of the Israelite camp, then surely there is a crushing irony in the Ark's being brought on to the battlefield as a prelude to the defeat and 'exile' of the Ark itself. The elders say 'let us take' (נִקְחָה), but in fact the Ark 'is taken' (נִלְקָח).

Second, Fokkelman has an extended discussion on Eli's incremental journey toward blindness. Ever alert to hear the faintest of narrative vibrations, Fokkelman suggests that Eli—who is now totally blind in ch. 4, after various references to his diminishing eyesight previously in chs. 1–3—now has a heightened sense of hearing because of his blindness. This

adds a certain poignancy to 1 Sam. 3.11, 'Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Look, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the two ears of anyone who hears of it tingle."' When viewed in terms of the second half of ch. 4, there is a contrast between Eli's internal perspective(s) and the various external reports that he hears, but cannot see; after all, not only is he 'ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set, so that he could not see (v. 15)', but he is also 'an old man, and heavy' (v. 18). This of course nicely exploits the semantic range of כבד, 'heavy/glory'. As Fokkelman comments, 'Even before we read this paragraph we realize that the literal "being heavy" of Eli is in an ironic relation to God's serious accusation that this family of priests fattens up [lit. makes heavy] its offspring at His expense' (1993: 226). Although Fokkelman does not mention this, there is an inverse set of physiological movements: as Eli's eyesight is gradually eaten away, the rest of him advances in corpulence. As the chapter draws to a close, the play of כבד, 'heavy/glory' continues with the poetic evocation of Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phineas. Fokkelman interacts with Willis (1971) and notes that the repetition of the daughter-in-law's dying words, and the 'double use' of גלה (to go into exile) reminds the reader of the double meaning of גלה earlier, since גלה is deployed in 2.27 (the choosing of Eli in the distant past) and ch. 3 with respect to the call of Samuel, the 'channel of God's revelation to the nation (גלה in 3.7 and 21)' (Fokkelman 1993: 233-34). Fokkelman concludes his reading of the Ark Narrative as part of the greater whole by noting:

> The 'Ichabod' definition—itself a telling one—of Israel's condition under the Elides, increases in significance due to its closure position. This also has repercussions on the name when it returns. This is the case in 14:3, in a striking enumeration, which ominously links Saul with an Elide priest; and that at a time when he has already clashed with the prophet and his son Jonathan outclasses him in initiative and leadership and even replaces him as actantial subject. At various times Jonathan is depicted in section II as a forerunner of David. The Saul–Ahiah combination of chapter fourteen utterly fails to comply with the *vis-à-vis* of 2:35b which has a priest acceptable to God always associate with the anointed. A while later, in 14:18, when king Saul wishes to consult God on the threshold of yet another battle against the Philistines, he asks the priest of 'faulty' origins to fetch *the ark*, which 'was with the Israelites.' This is another ominous similarity with the situation in 4:3-5, and this time too something strange happens. Saul does not complete what he has begun and breaks off the consultation, so that the ark disappears out of sight. Saul is responsible for nipping the consultation of God in the bud (1993: 242).

### 8. *Bruce Birch*

In his substantial contribution to the *New Interpreter's Bible* commentary, Bruce Birch provides an overview of past scholarship, and provides his own assessment of the Ark Narrative within the context of his exposition and points for reflection (1998). After addressing issues raised by Rost, Miller and Roberts, and Polzin, Birch concedes that the Ark Narrative is likely to be composite in character. However, in dialogue with Polzin's work in particular, Birch comments:

> Although 1 Samuel 4-6 may have had a separate literary pre-history, these chapters have been artfully incorporated into the context of 1 Samuel 1-7 and into the larger purposes of the Deuteronomistic History. To perceive these interconnections as skillfully created does not necessitate the suggestion of a single author (contra Polzin), but can be seen as a tribute to the skill of a historian who utilized a variety of materials to produce a telling of Israel's story for the sake of a generation in exile (1998: 995).

Birch concludes:

> The story of Israel's early loss of the ark would have been of obvious interest to exiles who had lost the ark in the destruction of Jerusalem (with Polzin). Although we may see evidence of earlier source materials used by the historian and make observations about them, our primary emphasis must be on the story of Israel in this transformative period as it is now told in the full text before us (1998: 996).

Thus, it is clear that Birch is more interested in final form, and how 1 Samuel 4–6 links with the rest of the narrative. Most intriguing for this present article are Birch's connections between the Ark Narrative and the twin pillars of Israel's exodus from Egypt and eventual exile to Babylon. Consider first his general remarks on the placement of the Ark Narrative:

> In the larger framework of the Deuteronomistic History the ark narrative may have a special significance for the community of exiles to whom that history was addressed. The exiles had also suffered defeat and lost the ark. They could not fail to identify with the plight of Israel when the ark was captured by the Philistines. This connection to the experience of exile seems explicit in the naming of Phinehas' son by his dying wife in 4:21-22, 'The glory has gone into exile from Israel' (author's trans. [גלה]; the NRSV and the NIV use the less descriptive 'departed'). The 'glory' [כבוד] refers to God's own being and is strikingly similar to the image in Ezek 10:18 for the departure of God's

> glory from the Temple in the exile experience. Chapters 5–6 of the ark narrative, which emphasize the continued sovereignty of God, the humiliation of the enemy, and return to the land, would be especially hopeful for exiles who read this history, trusting that God was also continuing to be active on their behalf. For exiles who read 1 Samuel 4:1-6, the message is that God continues to be at work even in apparent defeat. For exiles, kingship has ended, but God's sovereignty has not. In this larger deuteronomistic context, kingship has come and gone. First Samuel 4-6 may suggest that kingship had not really been needed. God's sovereignty is sufficiently reliable (1998: 997).

Numerous scholars, including some already mentioned in this article, have drawn attention to Exodus imagery in the Ark Narrative. In terms of the efficacy of such imagery, Birch is instructive at two points. First, with respect to 1 Samuel 4, he discusses the significance of the Philistines' drawing a parallel with Egypt (4.8-9), thus revealing their acquaintance with the watershed moment of Israelite history. This is in stark contrast to the elders of Israel previously calling for the ark, under the supervision of Eli's sons. The Philistines, however, are not infallible in their recollections, and Birch certainly does not miss the ideological humor in the line contained in the Philistine reference to 'these mighty gods' [האלהים האדירים האלה]: 'They are informed but not entirely accurate in their information. Nevertheless, it is the Philistines who alert the reader to exodus parallels and possibilities (a theme to which the Philistines return in 6.6)' (1998: 1001). Second, in terms of his discussion of 1 Samuel 6, Birch continues to develop the notion that it is an intentional irony on the part of the writer that the Philistines are the ones who alert the reader to exodus allusions. Such allusions arguably intensify in 1 Sam. 6.6, as the Philistine diviners warn their colleagues: 'Why should you harden [תכבדו] your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh [מצרים ופרעה] hardened their hearts?' As Birch suggests, this imagery has a specific application for an exilic context:

> Verses 5b-6 justify the Philistine plan by means of a remarkable appeal to the exodus tradition. The strategy is described as intended to 'give glory to the God of Israel.' This development is a reversal of the departure of 'glory' from Israel after the capture of the ark in 4:1-22. We are also reminded of Exod 14:4, 17, where God describes the exodus deliverance as 'gaining glory' over Pharaoh and Egypt. In both instances, God's glory is contrasted to the 'hardening' of the pharaoh's heart. This tradition is known to the Philistines in the ark story, and in v. 6 the priests and diviners argue against a 'hardening' of Philistine hearts lest they meet the same fate as Pharaoh and Egypt. God had 'made fools'

> ([התעלל], hithpael) of the Egyptians (the same word is used in Exod 10:2), and they still had to let the Israelites go. The argument seems to be that delay in letting the ark go could only result in further harm and humiliation. The return of the ark may be understood as a new exodus event—a release from bondage and a return to the land of Israel. Perhaps in the light of the exile language in 4:21, exiles were also meant to take hope in this story told to them through the Deuteronomistic History. Release and return are possible through the power of the Lord (1998: 1011).

## 9. *E.M.M. Eynikel*

'No publication treating the Ark Narrative begins without a reference to the 1926 Erlangen dissertation of Rost, who identifies the Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4.b–7.1; 2 Sam. 6:1-20) as a separate story, the so-called *Ladeerzählung*' (2000: 88). So begins E.M.M. Eynikel's article, in which he interacts with a number of relevant studies, and provides copious references to a host of secondary literature around the Ark Narrative. It is notable that Eynikel's study appears in a collection of articles on issues surrounding the Deuteronomistic History and more recent scholarly efforts to further understand this material. True to his opening words, Eynikel begins his study by tracing the lineaments of Rost's theory of the Ark Narrative and various reactions in recent research. It is apparent that Eynikel is concerned, among other things, with methodological priorities and diachronic questions, that is, the story of *how* the final form came to be; as he puts it, 'the building stones used to construct this final text have their own redactional and literary history' (2000: 106). Thus, there is a nice mediation between sensitivity to the compositional history of the text (*pace* past scholarship) and the place of this narrative within the final form of the Former Prophets (*pace* more recent scholarship).

Eynikel's article is divided into two basic parts. In the first part, Eynikel provides an overview of arguments in favor of or against the existence of an independent Ark Narrative, and presents a handy summary of both the salient questions and the variety of scholarly responses. Such questions include:

- What are the arguments for the unity of 1 Samuel 1–7?
- How does the Ark Narrative end (and what is the place of 2 Samuel 6)?
- What are the best arguments for an independent Ark Narrative tradition that was later incorporated into its present context?

Eynikel's article features sustained interaction with, for example, the older studies of Schicklberger (1973), Willis (1971), and Davies (1975), along with later studies of Van Seters (1983), Smelik (1992), Fokkelman (1993), and van der Toorn and Houtman (1994).

In the second part of his article, Eynikel provides his own assessment. He raises a number of provocative issues, ranging from questions of literary genre ('According to Campbell…the story…is intended to legitimize the new political situation, that came into existence with the establishment of the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem' [2000: 98, citing Campbell 1975: 202]) to matters of text criticism and provenance. Eynikel also interacts at length with the work of Spina (1991), and critiques the position of Gitay (1992).

Among the various strengths of Eynikel's study, the value for this present article is that it serves to illustrate the discernible shift that has taken place in recent analysis of the Ark Narrative. While his own conclusions are directed toward the history of composition, Eynikel's study nonetheless illustrates the direction recent scholarship has taken, moving beyond the kinds of source-critical and redactional concerns that have occupied biblical scholars since Rost. Scholarship now inclines toward a more sophisticated literary appraisal of the place of the Ark Narrative in the final form of 1 Samuel and the larger Deuteronomistic History.

### 10. *Graeme Auld*

Although his comments on 1 and 2 Samuel in his contribution to the recent *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (2003) are necessarily brief, Graeme Auld has two points of discussion on the Ark Narrative that merit attention here: the first pertaining to the literary artistry of the text, and the second relating to the 'exilic' contours of the passage. First, Auld comments on the prefatory importance of the prophetic word spoken to Eli as a necessary background to the Ark Narrative: 'The magnitude of the threat is suggested by the reaction of those who hear it (3.11). The wording anticipates warnings against Davidic Jerusalem by Jeremiah (19.3) and "his servants the prophets" (2 Kgs 21.12). The hint at the later royal house is reinforced by talk of Eli's "house" (3.12)' (2003: 216). There is a natural sense of movement, then, from the prophetic word directed against Eli's house to the conflict centered in the Ark Narrative:

> The first three chapters focused on Israel from within and on the [in]adequacy of her leadership. Attention now turns to that aspect of the external context, which will be most apparent in the books of

> Samuel: conflict with Philistia—but, more importantly, where real power and autonomous action belong (2003: 216).

For Auld, the Ark Narrative is thus tightly integrated with the antecedent material, including, of course, the inveterate prophetic word directed toward the house of Eli.

Auld's entry is a good example, to my mind, of how a recent commentary directed toward the general reader reflects current scholarly approaches toward the Ark Narrative. As discussed above, this is certainly the case with respect to Auld's comments on the literary integration of 1 Samuel 4–6 within the wider text of 1 Samuel, and also seems to be the case with his brief concluding comments about 'exile' and return. After the ark has been in Philistine territory for upwards of seven months, the Philistine diviners devise a test to determine a connection between the presence of the Ark and the appearance of a plague: 'If milking cattle, just separated from their calves, drag the cart without guidance (and away from their young) toward Israelite territory, then it is Yahweh who caused the Philistine troubles' (2003: 218). Auld continues, 'The alternative is equally interesting: if not Yahweh, then "chance"—or perhaps we should call it "fate", for in the books of Samuel, it always seems to be malign' (2003: 218). The curious return of the Ark, as Auld puts it in his concluding summary of his discussion of the Ark Narrative, contains hints of a message to a community in exile:

> Within these opening chapters which cast a long shadow, Yahweh letting the ark be taken may be a foretaste of Yahweh letting his temple, or 'house', in Jerusalem be taken by the Babylonians. If so, then its return to Israel unaided should remind Israel of the source of valid initiatives in response to that later collapse. And yet, if we are to see particular significance in the loss of the ark immediately after the call of Samuel, it may be that once prophecy was established, the ark was dispensable. Certainly, the book of Jeremiah (3:14-18) invites its readers not to expect a postexilic ark (2003: 218).

### 11. *Barbara Green*

As both editor of and contributor to the new Interfaces series, Barbara Green's book *King Saul's Asking* (2003) is primarily directed to students and the classroom. It is a remarkably creative work and interacts with a good deal of scholarship. Green particularly seeks to build on Polzin's insights, and specifically the provenance of exile for 1 Samuel within the larger Deuteronomistic History. Accordingly, Green views 1 Samuel as

part of a long narrative designed as a response to various questions posed by a community in exile. Like Polzin, Green understands the *asking for sons* in the early narratives of 1 Samuel as the central image chosen by the author to introduce the story of Israel's *asking for a king*:

> Insofar as we operate on the assumption or hypothesis that the asking of sons is like the asking for a king and have registered the insistence of that request from a number of voices, we have keyed to what I consider to be the book of 1 Samuel's primary task: to propose a riddle for consideration in the sixth century: shall we try to reestablish royal rule after the exile in Babylon or not? (2003: 19-20).

King Saul himself embodies this notion of 'riddle' since his name connotes 'asking' and he is the king that Israel has 'asked' for. In Green's view, the Ark has a particular role to play in this book about exile, and to help explicate her views on 'the Ark in exile' she appropriates the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981; cf. Green 2000). Of special relevance for Green's study is Bakhtin's notion of *chronotope*:

> A chronotope is the blending—or acknowledgment of the inseparability—of time and space. Not simply the same as setting (though including it), the chronotope also calls attention to the angle or viewpoint from which consciousness is portrayed. The most relevant chronotope here is exile, a concept that involves space away from home and time in the future as marked from the experience of the ark. Parabolically we are given a fast-forward into the early sixth century where the relationality of God and Israel is wrenched from its accustomed place to dwell among foreigners (Green 2003: 22).

The narrative of the loss, foreign sojourn and eventual return of the Ark thus contributes to the wider 'riddle' of 1 Samuel, and serves (among other things) as a touchstone for assessing the leadership in Israel that bore significant responsibility for the stewardship of the Ark. In my view, Green is most helpful in discussing the character zone of Eli, especially with respect to the report of the messenger and Eli's death/obituary notice in 1 Samuel 4. First, the memorable tableau of a blind Eli anxiously peering and in trepidation over the fate of the Ark is significant for Green, because Eli has no capacity to perceive the arrival of a courier 'with garments torn, and earth upon his head': 'The messenger is thus a picture of the news he is about to impart. Eli's sightless watching cannot pick that up, so the marked messenger and the blind watchman are for readers. The narrator skillfully directs our attention again to the question of inept, failed leadership' (2003: 28). Of course, Eli has been steadily growing blind

throughout the course of the narrative. His sight, if not his discernment, is keen enough to observe the moving lips of Hannah, but gradually the diminution of his sight is tracked (3.2) until it is totally gone (4.15). Again, building on Polzin's insight that this short scene captures something of the collapse of the monarchy in Israel in the long term, and also unveils glimpses of the forthcoming story in the short run, Green notes:

> The messenger overlooks blind Eli, who does not see his embodied message. Failed leadership is once again underscored. Eli's slowness or reluctance to construe the significance of what he hears in the reaction of the city gives us a chance to watch him closely. He call the messenger 'my son,' perhaps conventional for an old man to a young warrior; but in this case it recalls his address to the young Samuel in 3:16, to his own two in 2:24. That the messenger is a Benjaminite, unnamed, gives the careful-reading and resourceful rabbis of later centuries the space to identify him as the young Saul. In our riddling mode the runner's identity is shrewdly observed. It helps us make the transition from the 'old sons' of Eli, including the much-asked Samuel, to the new son Saul, whom we will be meeting shortly (2003: 29).

A second point about Eli's character zone relates to the aged priest's reaction to the battlefield report in 1 Sam. 4.18. As discussed earlier in this article, the report about the disaster of defeat, capture of the Ark, and death of Eli's sons is delivered by 'one bringing good news' (הַמְבַשֵּׂר). While the messenger faithfully reports the news of the great slaughter among the troops and the fatalities of Hophni and Phineas, it seems to be the mention of the Ark that triggers Eli's catastrophic plunge: 'Then, just as he mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell off his throne backwards, beside the city gate. He had a broken neck, and he died, for he was a very old man, and heavy [כבד]. He had judged Israel for forty years' (1 Sam. 4.18). For Green, the manner of Eli's death (agreeing with Polzin that 'Eli represents all the burden and doom that kingship brought Israel' [Polzin 1993: 64]) is most poignant, since Eli's death functions as a *mise-en-abysme* in a narrative about falling kingship: the (backward) fall of Eli anticipates the (forward) fall of Saul (2003: 27). After the dramatic backward fall, the notice of Eli as a judge is most arresting for the reader:

> We find out, for the first time, that Eli is not simply a priest, but also a judge, the first we have heard mentioned since the death of the notorious Samson (Judges 13–16), who fought Philistines intermittently, but on the whole ineffectively. The destructive events of Judges 17–21 that are hence laid, if indirectly, at the feet of Eli, are implied to have occurred on his watch—the watch of a blind man. But attentive reading will not miss this final slur on Elide leadership (2003: 29).

The authorial notice of Eli as a judge for 40 years has, in general, provoked a somewhat standard response in critical commentaries. However, in terms of the larger narrative poetics, this notice has an important function. In Green's view, both the death of Eli, the notice of his 40-year tenure as judge of Israel, and the birth of Ichabod that follows 'serve purposes far beyond their obvious content', and are probably designed as a response toward the question: 'With what sort of leadership will the new community resume its life in the land?' (2003: 30, 24). She concludes:

> The 'one thing needful' is for a leader to shepherd well the bond between God and people. Insofar as the ark is a symbol of that relationship—makes manifest the commitment of YHWH to the people chosen and their responsive worship and culture—the leadership has not only failed but abused its task. The Elides bring the ark to the occasion of its exile and that catastrophe wipes them out, except for a new born (2003: 32).

## 12. *Antony F. Campbell, SJ*

It is particularly fitting that the twelfth scholar in this survey is a distinguished savant of the Ark Narrative. By means of a monograph (1975), a *JBL* article (1979) and a very recent commentary on 1 Samuel (2003), Campbell has made a substantial contribution to this area of biblical research. For convenience, I will limit my comments on Campbell's work to his commentary (2003), and assume that his other discussions are at least touched on in this FOTL volume. Three matters will be discussed here, all of which are to some degree interrelated: Campbell's structure and outline of the narrative, his treatment of the textual issue at 1 Sam. 6.19, and his views on the theological direction of the story as a whole.

First, with respect to structure, Campbell has a number of programmatic statements. He is concerned to establish the limits and extent of the text, and draws on earlier analyses in his monograph and article. In the final form of the narrative, there is a tight integration of episodes, and the importance of the opening sequence should not be underestimated:

> At the level of the larger narrative, this opening section takes what might have been an almost banal incident in the fortunes of Israel and transforms it into an episode of national importance. As a simple incident in the military and religious story of Israel, it would have meant no more than that the ark was carried into battle and lost, only to be recovered within the year (2003: 67).

However, as Campbell continues, 'The art of this text has been to take a potentially banal incident and make it a matter of key significance for the theological story of Israel.' It is the opening chapter that sets the tone for the whole, and establishes the key question: 'Why has the LORD put us to rout today before the Philistines?' This question, as Campbell puts it, 'is not allowed to be passed over as a rhetorical throwaway. It has fatal overtones. It is associated with statements of God's exile from Israel. It cries out for exploration and explanation' (2003: 70). For Campbell, it is clear that the structure of the narrative contributes to the overall meaning. Consider, then, his broad outline of the narrative in its sequential unfolding:

The Departure of the Ark from the National Scene (1 Sam. 4:1b-7:1)
- I. Departure of the ark from Israel: Israel's loss of God's favor (4:1b-22)
  - A. Military loss (1b-11)
    1. 1st report of battle: initial defeat of Israel (1b-2)
    2. Account of hopes and fears raised (3-9)
    3. 2nd report of battle: definitive defeat of Israel (10-11)
  - B. Significance of the loss (12-22)
    1. As fatal: death of Eli (12-18)
    2. As abandonment: naming of Ichabod (1922)
- II. Reversal of the situation of defeat (5:1-12)
  - A. Introduction: Philistines bring the ark to Ashdod (1)
  - B. Demonstration of YHWH's supremacy and disfavor (2-12)
    1. Toward the Philistine god: in the temple of Dagon (2-5)
    2. Toward the Philistine people: in the cities of the Philistines (6-12)
- III. Return of the ark to Israel: without Israel's return to God's favor (6:1-7:1)
  - A. Return of the ark from Philistine territory (1-18)
    1. Consultation of diviners by the Philistines (1-9)
    2. Compliance with the diviners' instructions (10-18)
  - B. Departure of the ark: no bestowal of God's favor (6:19-7:1)
    1. Disaster: sudden death associated with the ark (19a)
    2. Consequences: departure of the ark to Kiriath-jearim (19b-7:1)

(Campbell 2003: 61)

Second, Campbell's response to the text-critical analyses of 1 Sam. 6.19 merits reflection. The text itself is notoriously difficult, and the MT is challenging to interpret: 'He struck at the men of Beth-shemesh [וַיַּךְ בְּאַנְשֵׁי בֵית־שֶׁמֶשׁ] because they looked at the Ark of the LORD [כִּי רָאוּ בַּאֲרוֹן יְהוָה]'. At this point, a host of commentators and translations default to the LXX. The NAB, for instance, renders the line as 'The descendants of Jeconiah did not join in the celebration with the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the LORD, and seventy of them were struck down.' To be sure, recourse to the LXX does not entirely

resolve the issue; in fact, more problems seem to be raised (see also Eslinger 1985: 453). Hence, Campbell's treatment of this problem is all the more acute in light of the difficulties this verse has posed for commentators. I am providing an extensive quotation not only because it is a piquant discussion of the issue at hand, but also because it is typical of Campbell's approach to text-criticism—he always considers the relevant evidence *and* the larger literary context:

> The text of 6:19 defies satisfactory reconstruction; no reconstruction should eliminate its mystery. Some texts are not for sanitizing. As a beginning, it is inadequate; it has no subject. As a logical statement, it is inadequate: the reason given for the disaster is not appropriate. The MT, literally translated, reads: because they looked at the ark; it provides no cause for the slaughter. The RSV rendering (NRSV margin) 'because they looked *into* the ark' is unique to this occasion, trying to provide a reason. The NRSV and others reconstruct from the LXX: 'The descendants of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the LORD'. The difficulty with any rendering that makes the disaster intelligible is that it then nullifies the question in v. 20: 'Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?' The traditional liturgical reply is given in Psalm 15. If the answer is clear—those can stand before the ark who keep the liturgical or cultic rules about not looking into the ark or who have an appropriately worshipful attitude—then it would be the height of stupidity to banish the ark to Kiriath-jearim. But the ark is banished and the text is not about stupidity. With unintelligibility and mystery preserved, it becomes clear that the ark is not yet the occasion for blessing in Israel; it is dangerous to have it around. What cries out for explanation is the fact that the text includes so negative an episode in what is otherwise so positive a story for Israel. There has been a 'great slaughter' (6:19); the last 'great slaughter' we heard of was suffered by Israel in the second battle at Ebenezer-Aphek (4:10) (2003: 81).

Third, Campbell is particularly loquacious on the theological direction of the overall narrative.

> The ark of God is portrayed as the symbol of God's presence to Israel. Its withdrawal from Shiloh is a significant change in the status quo. Its failure to return to Shiloh raises questions about God's purpose with regard to Israel. The ark eventually returns to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6); a major change in the national institutions of Israel is confirmed (cf. Ps. 78:67-69) (2003: 60).

In terms of the beginning of the story, for Campbell the end is already in sight. If Shiloh represents the element of departure, then it is Jerusalem that represents the return:

> No theology could leave the ark of God in obscurity without adequately accounting for the absence of God from Israel. Departure is a correlative either of abandonment or return. Once the presence of the ark in Jerusalem is acknowledged, for those for whom the ark is the exclusive symbol of God's presence in Israel, its departure from Shiloh is shrouded in uncertainty (2003: 60-61).

Here Campbell is drawing from his earlier work, and has 2 Samuel 6 as the natural conclusion to the story. As far as the date of composition is concerned, the Ark Narrative was probably not written prior to the arrival of the Ark into the city of David: 'The period of the ark's "retirement" at Kiriath-jearim does not seem a likely time for their extensive propagation; more probable is the period after the ark had been brought to Jerusalem, and when its presence there was seen as a sign of God's blessing and approval for the Davidic monarchy' (2003: 75). One assumes that Campbell will resume his discussion of the Ark Narrative in his companion volume in the FOTL series on 2 Samuel, and several of these matters will thus be brought to resolution. Meanwhile, his discussion of the 'meaning' of this section of the Ark Narrative leaves the reader tantalized with a host of queries:

> We are left with the questions: 'Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? To whom shall he go up from us?' (6:20; the NRSV's 'so that we may be rid of him' is an unduly interpretative rendering). The immediate answer is: to Kiriath-jearim. As a long-term answer, that is the equivalent of abandonment. The long-term answer is provided in 2 Sam 6: the ark will go to David's Jerusalem. 2 Sam 6 also answers the question with which the entire narrative began: 'Why has the LORD put us to rout today before the Philistines?' (1 Sam 4:3). From the endpoint of the ark's coming to Jerusalem we can see that the answer is: because God left the Israel of old, symbolized by Shiloh, in order to return to the new Israel, symbolized by Jerusalem. All that has taken place in between has been God's will, God's power and purpose at work in Israel. These aspects need to be seen from the point of view of 2 Sam 6 (2003: 82-83).

## *Conclusions*

Based on this brief survey, it is evident that recent scholarship on the Ark Narrative has been concerned with a different set of questions than those that piqued the interest of researchers in the wake of Rost. Inquiry surrounding the extent of the original text, date of composition, positioning

of 2 Samuel 6, and layers of redaction (e.g. the notice of Eli's judgeship as a post-Dtr addition) has, for many scholars, been replaced with a concern to understand the place and role of the Ark Narrative within the final form of the Deuteronomistic History, and how this material would have been heard from the vantage point of Israel's exile. Already in the early 1980s, Van Seters's trenchant criticism of the Rost hypothesis provided some momentum in this direction:

> Once the story is seen in its larger Dtr context, however, another major concern immediately comes to mind—the exile. It is precisely at this time that 'the glory has been *exiled* from Israel' (1 Sam. 4.21, 22). What happened to the Ark at the time of the fall of Jerusalem is unknown, but there is no reason to doubt that it was part of the booty taken from the Temple (1983: 352).

Van Seters also suggests: 'Yet the larger question that was being addressed in this story about an earlier capture of the Ark was whether the deity was now subject to the foreign gods or still in control of the affairs of men. In somewhat different, though related, ways, Dtr and Ezekiel answer this question by affirming the latter' (1983: 352). Of course, many issues relating to the Deuteronomistic History are rather problematic these days (see Römer and de Pury 2000: 24-141), but my point here would be that the virtual consensus generated by Rost has come under intense scrutiny in the past two decades, and many scholars are now more interested in literary questions surrounding the final form and exilic *chronotope*.

Consequently, one can anticipate further developments and lines of research in several different directions. A number of points raised by the above scholars engender a host of further literary implications for study of the Ark Narrative. One line of inquiry that seems promising relates to the foreshadowing of the David/Saul antagonism as articulated by Sweeney (2001: 110-24). For instance, how does the identity of the messenger who brings the news to Eli (1 Sam. 4.12) as a 'man of Benjamin' square with other allusions to Rachel in the Ark Narrative (the death of Eli's daughter-in-law seems to allude to the death of Rachel in childbirth), and elsewhere in 1 Samuel (e.g. the rivalry between Hannah and Peninnah evokes memories of Rachel and Leah in 1 Samuel 1, and the mention of 'Rachel's Tomb' in 1 Sam. 10.2)? Furthermore, in a provocative article, Auld notes that in the wider literary context 'the death of Eli and his sons prefigures the end of the house of Saul in favor of a new and different order' (2001: 44). Auld continues the point and emphasizes an intimate connection between chs. 3 and 4:

> However, in the whole context of Samuel and Kings, the message Samuel receives is also pregnant with threat against David's house. And, in case we are unable to hear it in 1 Sam. 3, we may see it in 1 Sam. 4, when we observe Eli fall off his throne—the כִּסֵּא [throne] on which Saul never sat, but David did (2001: 44).

Other questions of course remain: How do the internal symmetries within the Ark Narrative function as narrative analogies, such as the fall of Eli in ch. 4 mirroring or reflecting the fall of Dagon in ch. 5? Does the geographical subterfuge at the end of ch. 6 (when the Ark is sent to the Gibeonite city of Kiriath-jearim) align with the larger pattern of deception in Gibeon elsewhere in the Deuteronomistic History? In what other ways does 2 Samuel 6 connect with the Ark Narrative of 1 Samuel 4–6? Prospective ark-eological enterprises, it would seem, have a bright future indeed.

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