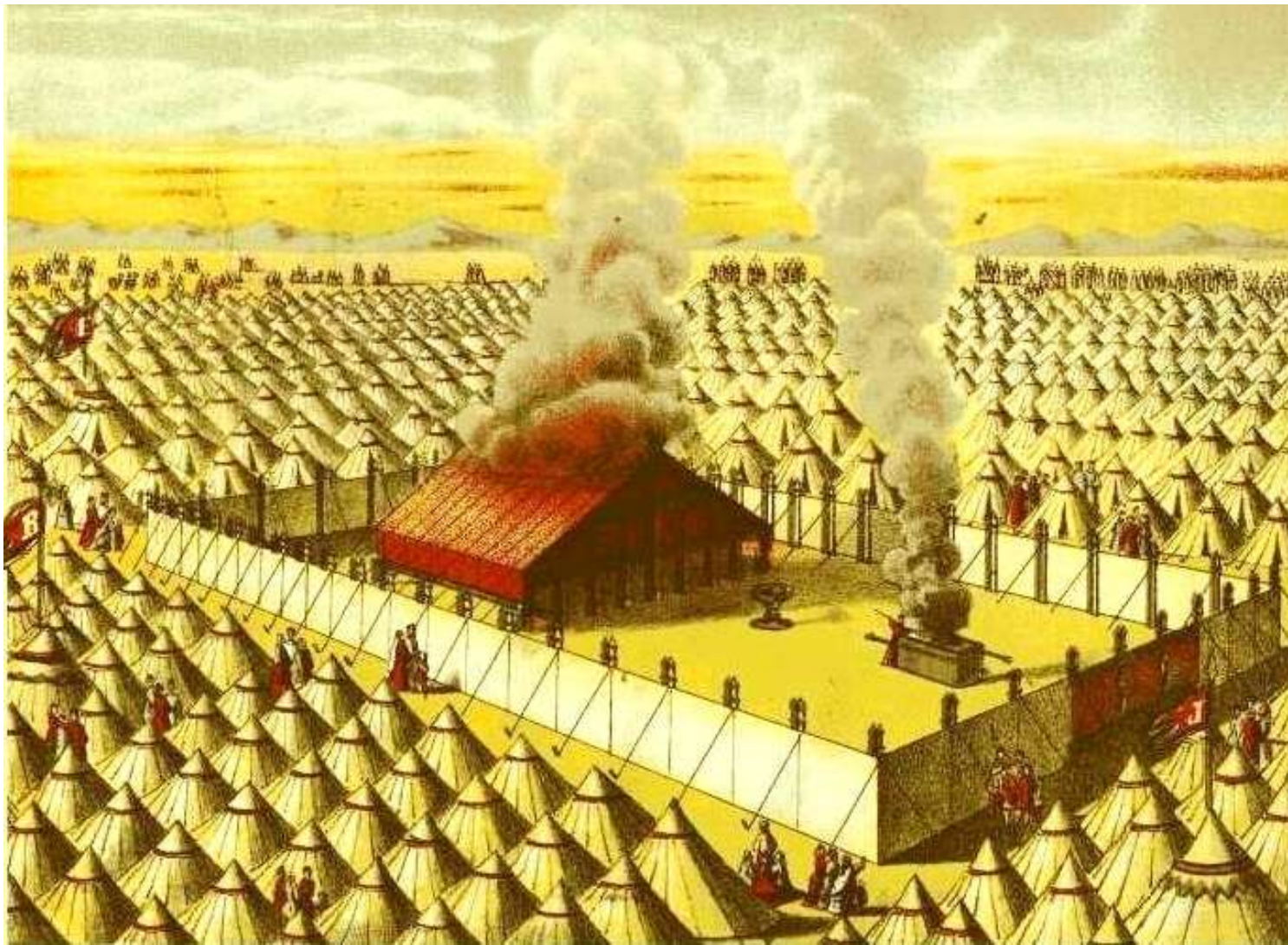




The biblical Ark
of the Covenant –
What was it?
What was in it?
Where is it today?

Dave Shafer
CHJ

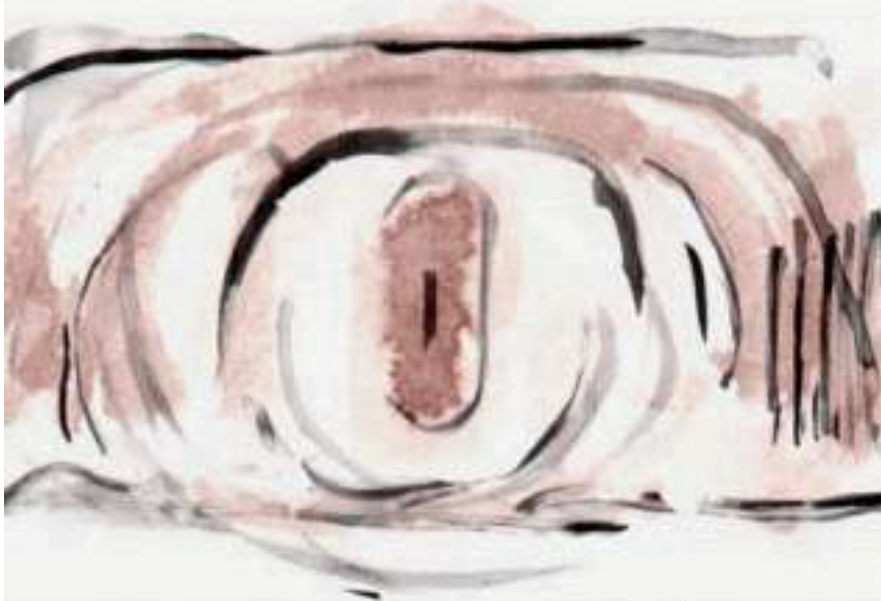


The 12 different tribes would each have their own areas of encampment around the central Tabernacle.

In the Torah, God gives Moses very explicit directions on how to build a tabernacle – a dwelling place for God while the Jews are wandering around in the Sinai desert. It is an enclosure that has several objects of great significance within it, like the Ark of the Covenant.

Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek

Thorleif Boman



"A classic study of the differences between
Greek and Hebrew thought."—John E. Resine,
Colgate University

The ancient Greeks cared mightily about how an object looked but could not care less about how it was made. The ancient Hebrews were just the reverse. They were very interested in how something could be made but cared little about appearance. The Torah is filled with examples where God gave extremely detailed instructions to Noah and Moses on exactly how to build Noah's Ark or the Tabernacle and its contents, like the Ark of the Covenant. Detailed dimensions, materials, how to assemble it, etc.



Because of the detailed building directions in the Torah, we know pretty much what the Ark of the Covenant looked like. This old painting is supposed to show Moses and Joshua bowing before it



The outer areas inside the enclosure and around the central tent had an altar for sacrifice and other items, like a gold candelabra

The central tent was where God lived. It was divided into two sections – an outer half and then a curtain covering the back half. In that back half was the Holy of Holies – the dwelling of God. The High Priest could only enter that part once a year, on Yom Kippur. What was in the Holy of Holies? – I’m glad you asked - it was the Ark of the Covenant. And just what was that? It was a portable container that is described in very great detail.



There are two interesting questions about the Ark –
1) why did it look the way it did and

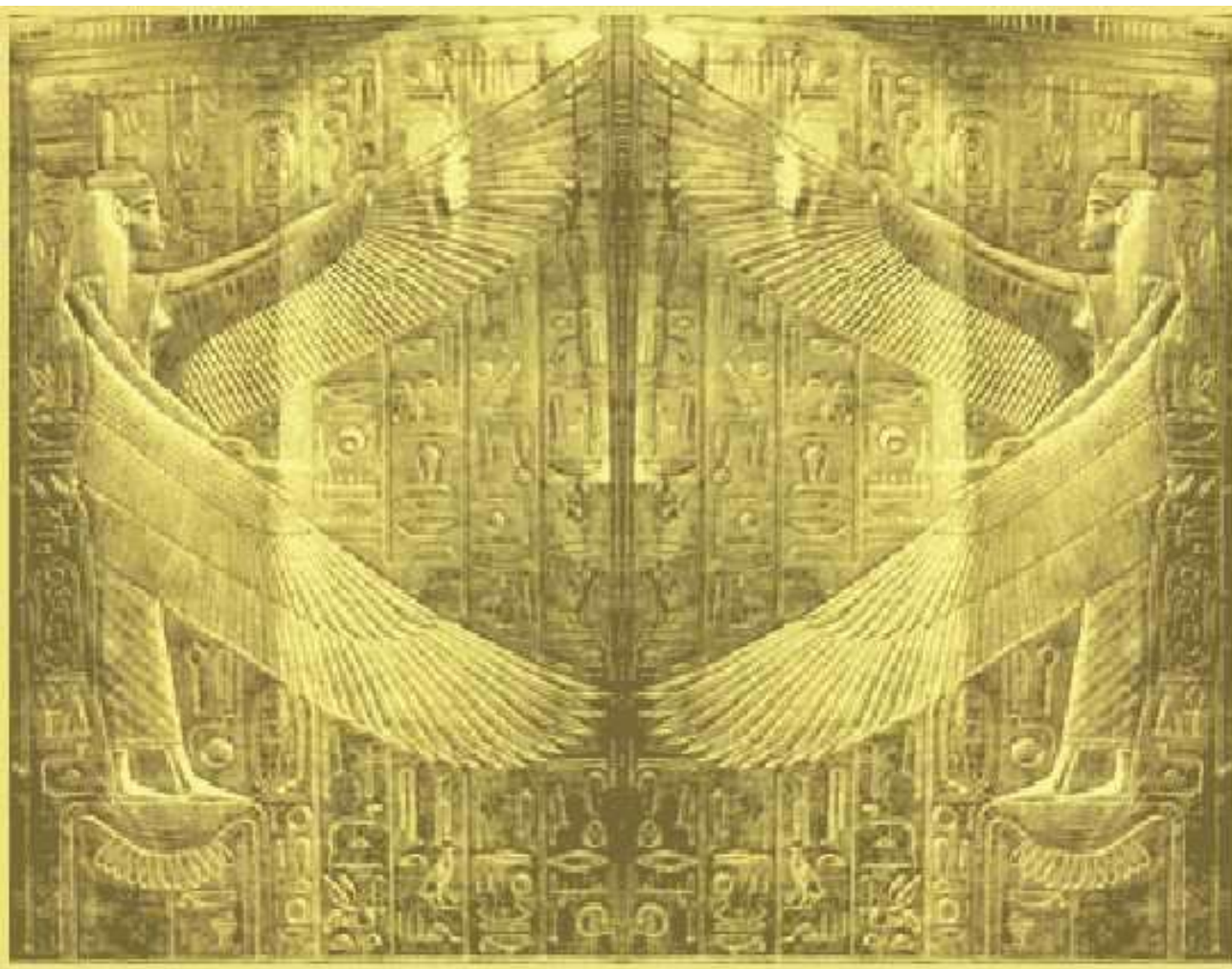
2) what was in it?

It was a peculiar object because it had two very different functions. One was to hold whatever was inside. The other was to serve as a location from which God would speak. The voice would come from between the two cherubim on top of the Ark. They are sort of “angels” and their wings almost touch.

The Ark had four rings for poles to go through so that it could be carried without being touched

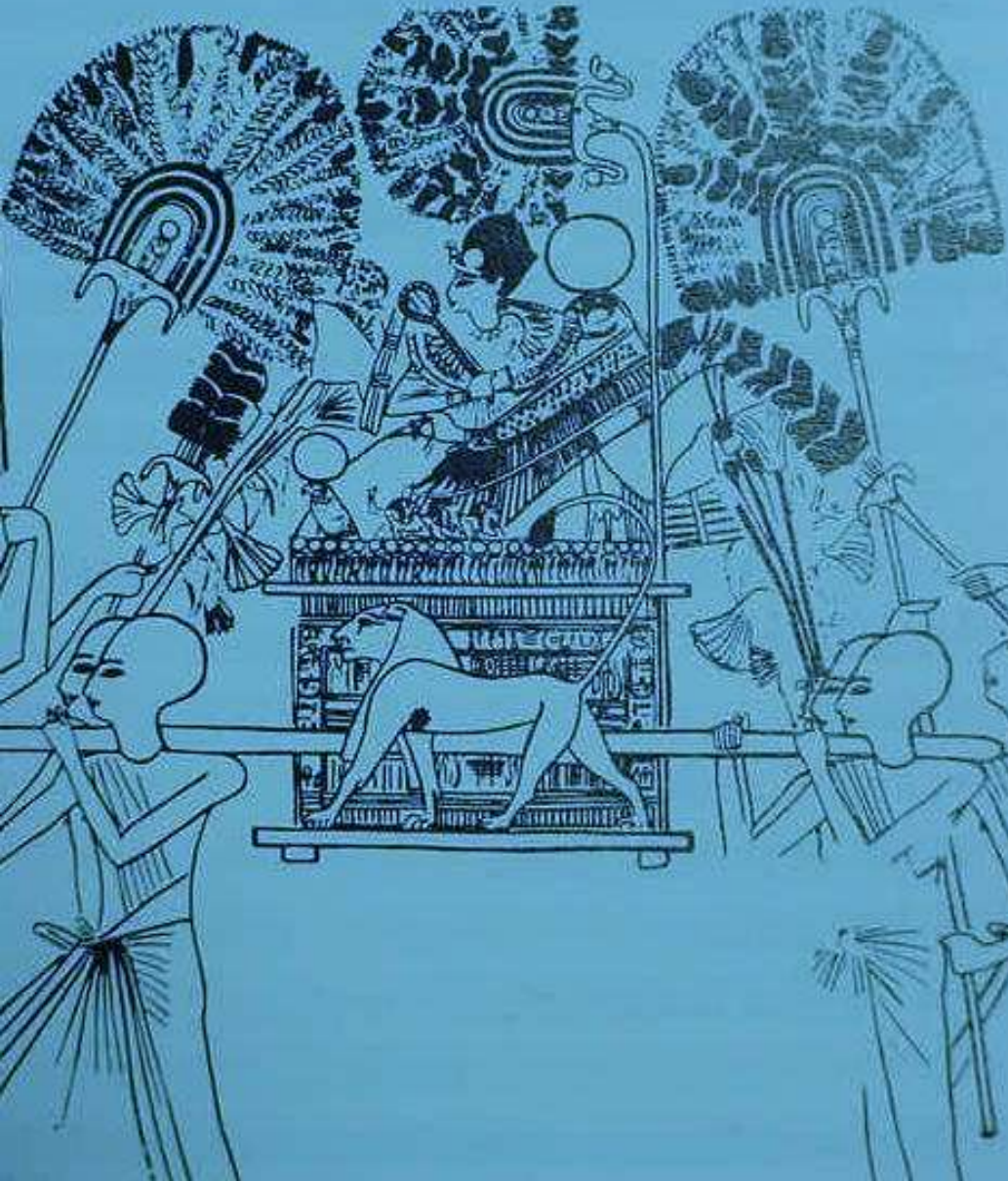


Some of the more wild speculations about the Ark point out its very close similarity to a giant electrical capacitor – lined with gold, carrying rods so you don't have to touch it, and two large gold electrical spark discharge terminals – the almost touching wing tips of the cherubim. The voice of God, which the Torah says emerges from between the wing tips, was maybe loud electrical sparks.



Egyptian cherubim as tomb decorations

Whatever you may think of that odd idea, identical cherubim were part of Egyptian tomb decorations, as we see here. These predate the Torah and the Exodus, so it might be that the Jews took this design with them when they left Egypt. There is more evidence for this idea when we consider a different Egyptian item.



This is a portable Egyptian throne chair. It could be used to carry the Pharaoh around and it was also used in some religious processions to carry images of Egyptian gods, seated on their thrones.

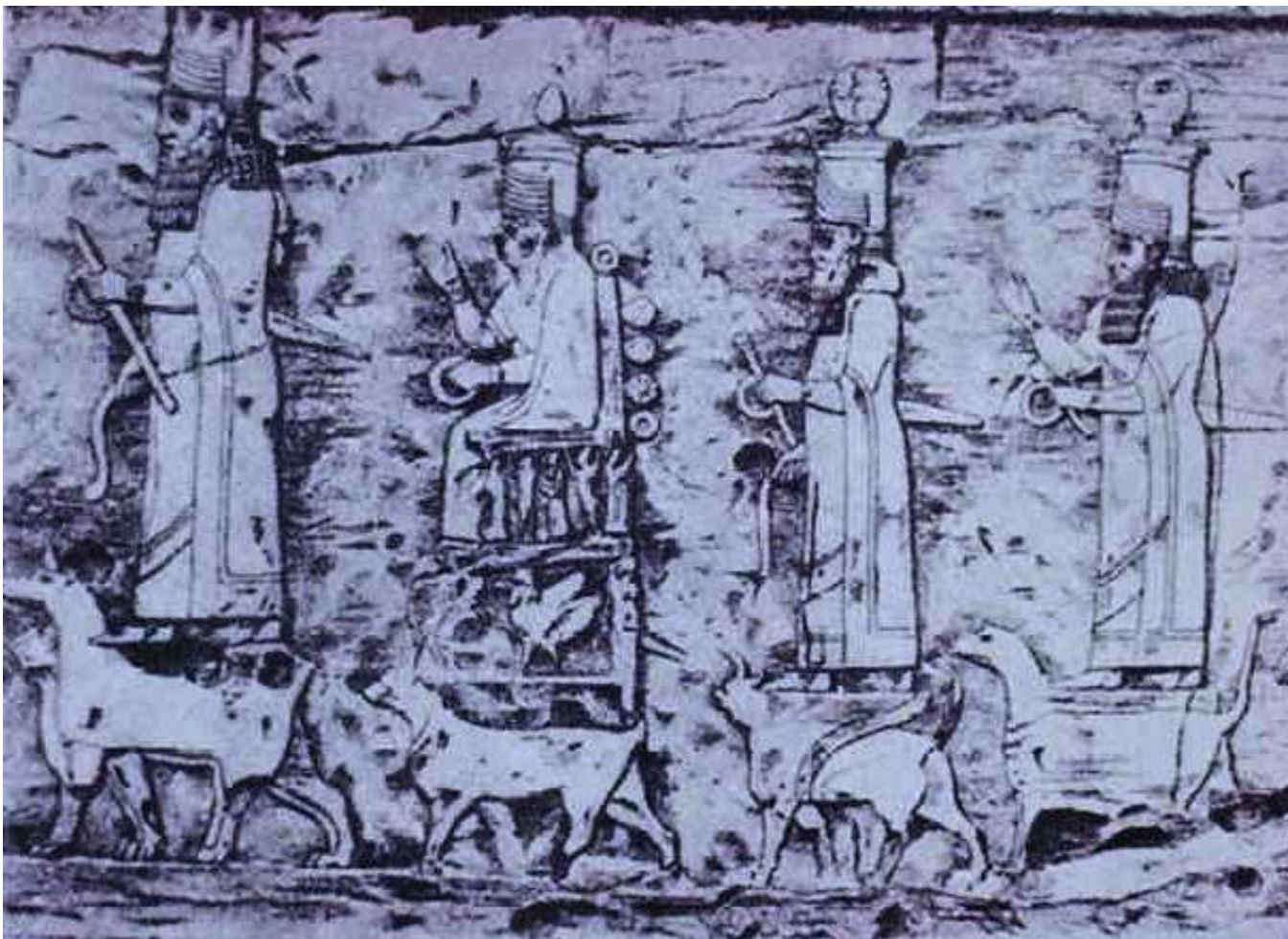
Most likely the Jews also took this idea with them when they left Egypt, and the Ark of the Covenant is a portable throne for Yahweh. But there could be no image on the throne of the Jewish god.





In particular, Egypt, Canaan, and Babylonia had ancient literatures that often throw light on puzzling Torah passages and allow us to understand them.

The ancient Hebrews had certain unique qualities that made them stand out, but they also shared much with their surrounding neighbors. We can understand the Torah much better if we look at religious practices and literatures of nearby cultures.



Stone carving showing Assyrian gods (stone idols) in an ancient religious procession.

There was no idol of Yahweh that could be paraded at religious events, but the Ark could be carried around and was supposed to be where Yahweh lived.

These Assyrian idols are being carried by animals, maybe because of their weight, but the Ark was carried by men holding its carrying poles





In 2 Kings 5:17 we read that Naaman took 2 mule loads of dirt from Israel to Syria, so that he could worship Yahweh on the soil that Yahweh lived on. God was thought to live in a particular place, so if you weren't there you had to bring some of it (dirt) with you.

Dracula was supposed to sleep in a coffin, when he traveled, containing dirt from back home in Transylvania. This was essential. A similar idea to this ancient biblical one.





The Ark was taken into battles where its “miraculous” powers could decide the outcome.



When the Ark was brought across the Jordan river, the Tenakh says the waters parted for it.



The Ark of the Covenant did not leave the Tabernacle when the Jews were in the Sinai desert. But when they reached Israel, the Promised Land, it was carried into battle with the local tribes there and played a key role in victories, due to its “magic” and supernatural powers. In much more recent times, armies carry their flag or banner into battle.



So one function of the Ark was probably to act as a portable throne for Yahweh, on top of the Ark. The other was to contain something. What was that something, inside the Ark? Now there is a mystery.



It is almost universally assumed that the Ark contained the two tablets of the 10 Commandments. But the Torah does not originally say that. It does later on in Deuteronomy, when looking back to Exodus, but when this is first told, in Exodus, God says to Moses that he will give him the “Pact” of the covenant between God and the people, to put into the Ark. It does not say the two stone tablets, which had just been mentioned several times before. The Rabbis say that at that very key passage in the Torah the tablets are “implied”. Baloney! (kosher baloney). It says the “Pact”, not tablets.

[Exodus 25:16](#) "You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you."

[Exodus 25:21](#) "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you."

[Exodus 40:20](#) "Then he took the testimony and put it into the ark, and attached the poles to the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark."

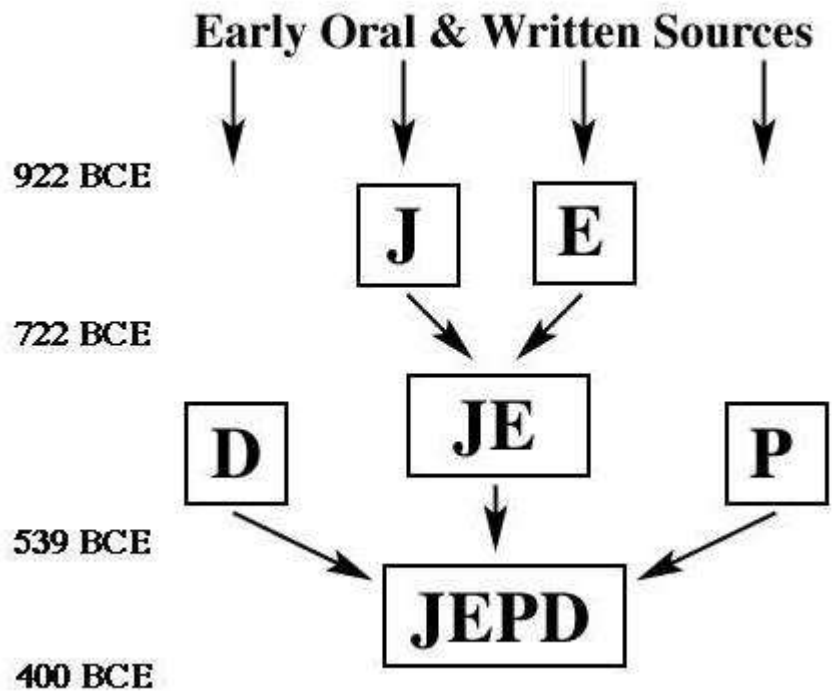
These are the **only** times in Exodus that something is put into the Ark. It is the Pact or Testimony (both translations are used). It never says (in Exodus) that the twin stone tablets are put in.



Manna fell from the sky and was an odd sort of food.



In Exodus 16:32-34 Moses tells Aaron to put aside some manna in a pot to show future generations, and to “lay it up before the **Pact**” (or **Testimony**). This precedes the creation of the twin tablets of the 10 Commandments and “before” implies that the Pact or Testimony was some sort of physical object. It could **not** have been the twin tablets! Rashi’s commentary does not help here. He says this verse must be out of sequence. How convenient!



covenant

tablets

stone

Pact, Testimony

If the Pact or Testimony is not the same as the stone tablets then what is it?

Biblical scholars recognize four separate strands or sources that came together to make the final version of the Torah. The D source, of Deuteronomy is later than the J and E and P sources of the rest of the Torah. Exodus talks often of the stone tablets but never says that they are put into the Ark. It says that the Pact or Testimony is put in the Ark but this is clearly not the same thing or it would have said so.

Deuteronomy says that the tablets are put in the ark, but this is a much later tradition, shown to the left here, which is suspect.



We know that it was probably not a Twinkie, inside the Ark of the Covenant. Although Twinkies were around back then and have, in fact, always existed from the dawn of time, the older versions were not kosher.

My theory of what was inside the Ark is definitely more plausible and is based on some reasonable assumptions.



Over the ages the assumed contents of the Ark kept changing. In the Christian bible it contains the two stone tablets of the 10 Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and a box of manna. With enough time in the future it might become stuffed to the top with whatever, like this bulging box.



People in the ancient Middle East worshipped sacred stones

If we assume there ever was an Ark, then we should probably only go with the earliest account of it in Exodus. What might that “Pact” or “Testimony” be, that was put into it? The Ark was the “Holy of Holies” What do we know about sacred objects in that day?



Exodus 34:13 “Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones... “

2 Kings 18:4 “He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones..”

and many other similar references elsewhere to sacred stones.



The way orthodox Jews revere the Wailing Wall makes it very much seem like modern day sacred stones.

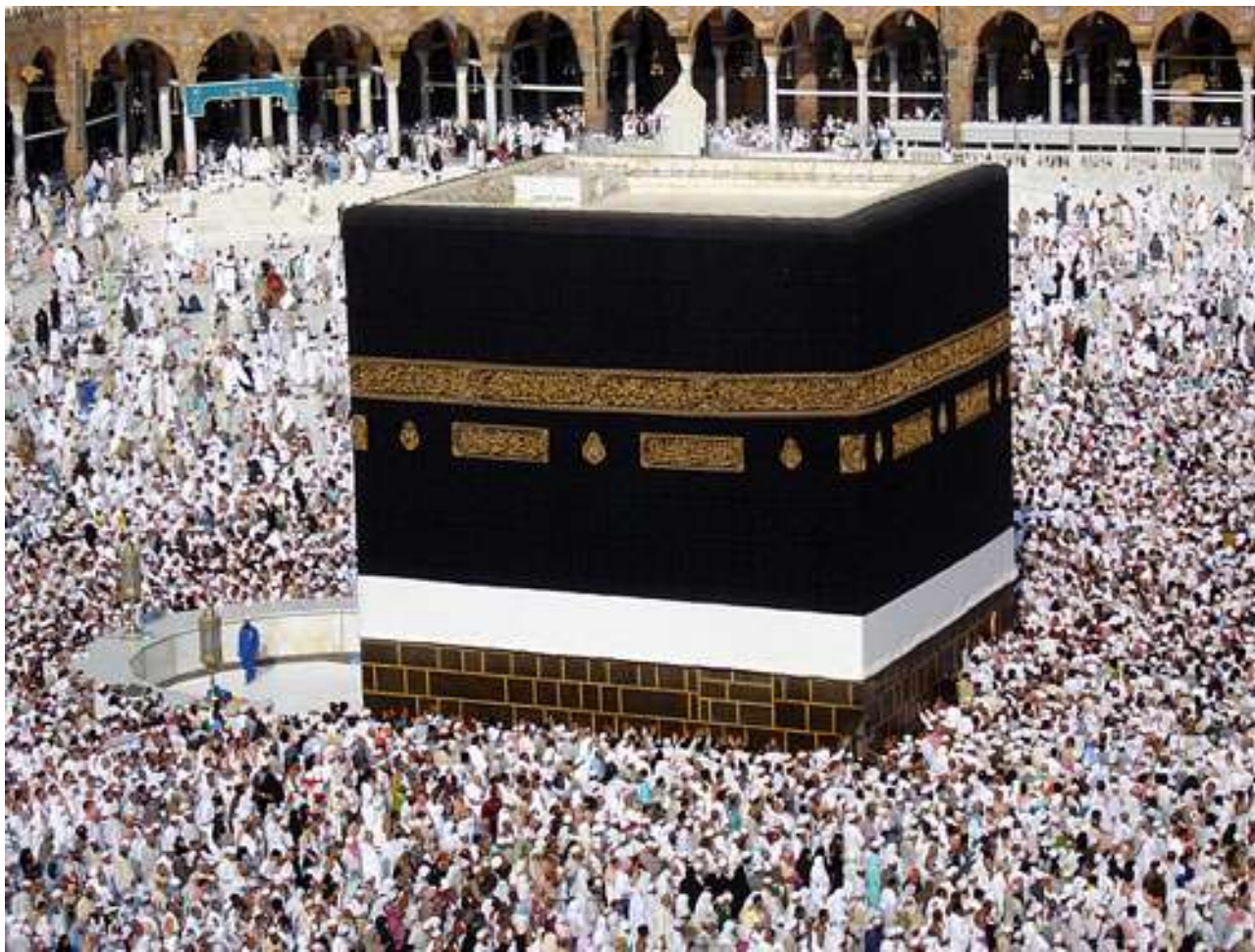


There is one special kind of sacred stone that ancient people all over the world have always regarded as miraculous – a stone that falls from the sky.

It might be that what was in the sacred Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the covenant between God and the Jews, was a miraculous meteorite – a stone sent by God from heaven.



A stone falling from the sky is like raining cats and dogs – it seems impossible and miraculous.



You can imagine how miraculous it would be to see a meteorite streak through the night sky and then actually land where it can be found and seen up close.

In Mecca is the Ka'baa – the holiest site in Islam. It is a large cubic enclosure and inside is the most sacred object – a stone. What kind of stone? A meteorite that is said to have been sent by God (Allah) to Abraham. Another example (like the one that was maybe inside the Ark of the Covenant) of a meteorite with great religious significance.

Muhammad re-dedicating the Black Stone at the Kabah in Mecca



Like most meteorites, the black stone has an unusual look to it.

From the Christian bible (New Testament), Acts 19:35-36

³⁵ The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Fellow Ephesians, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶



This temple in Ephesus, Turkey, was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, and it contained a sacred meteorite.



Roman coins showing the Stone of Emesa, Syria, 218 A.D.

This was a sacred meteorite that was worshiped as a god and had its own temple, shown (figuratively) on the right hand image of the coin. Emesa is the modern day city of Homs in Syria, now in the news because of protests.



Yet another sacred meteorite

This coin shows the sacred Stone of Emesa (meteorite) being drawn around in a chariot.

METEORITE SPARKS A CULT

BY PIERRE M. BELLEMARE

Ottawa, Ontario

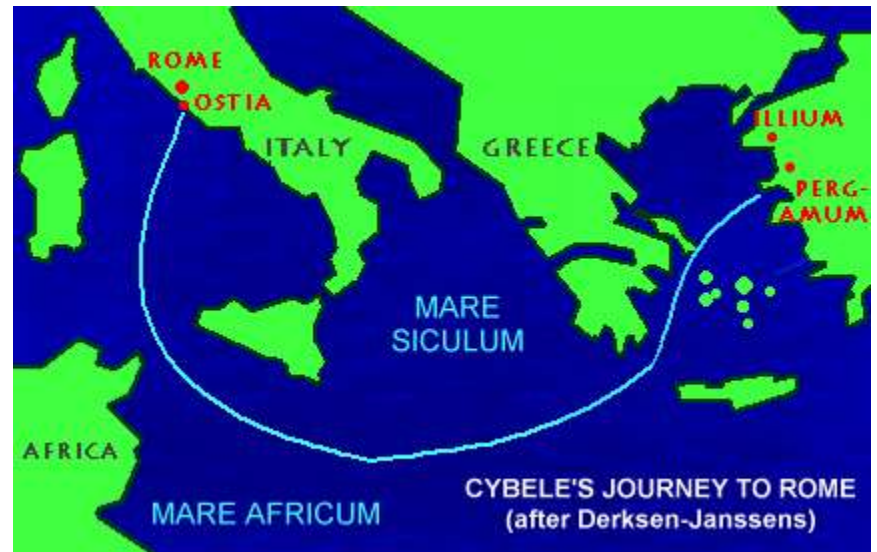
In the third century C.E., in the Syrian city of Emesa (now Homs), there was a large temple built atop a hill and dedicated to the Sun-God Elagabalus. That edifice contained a sacred image of the god *not wrought by human hands*, which took the unusual form of a sizeable cone-shaped black stone. Sacred stones, also known as baetyls, were not rare in ancient times, particularly in the East, but this one was something special — it was said to have fallen from the sky. More likely than not, it was a meteorite.

The exact origin of the Elagabalus stone remains obscure, but in historical times its destiny was closely intertwined with that of a dynasty of king-priests who had been nomads, Bedouins of the desert, before settling down in Emesa to erect a shrine to Elagabalus. Eventually, that cult became famous and popular, so much so that Elagabalus ended up being the chief deity of the Roman Empire under the title “deus invictus Sol Elagabalus,” albeit for a short period of time, between A.D. 218 and 222.

That period corresponds to a rather interesting episode during the latter years of the Roman Empire, when the Empire came to be ruled for four years by the then high-priest, a mere boy of 13. His official name as Roman emperor was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, but he is better known to history under the Latinized



Aniconic black stone once venerated at the Temple of Aphrodite, near Paphos, Cyprus.



A black meteorite in Turkey was considered to be the idol of the Goddess Cybele and was taken to Rome where a temple was built around the stone.

These two examples from the distant past, as well as the others already shown, demonstrate that sacred meteorites were worshipped as gods and how important they were in antiquity. A miraculous meteorite associated with the Ark would be very much in keeping with the cultures of that day, although it was not directly worshipped (the Torah says). Of course various idols, like Moses's copper snake, were worshipped (oh-oh!) but that was apostasy.



There was an earlier Covenant in the Torah between God and man, at the time of Noah. After the flood God said that he would never do this again and created a sign of this new covenant – the rainbow. This sign in the sky may find a parallel in a later sign in the sky for another new covenant – a plunging meteorite from the heavens that was then put into the Ark as a symbol from God of this new covenant.



The rainbow was not the covenant between God and Noah, after the flood, it was a sign of the covenant.

Circumcision was not the covenant between God and Abraham, it was a sign of the covenant. A stone that fell from the sky (meteorite) may have been the

miraculous sign of the new covenant in the Sinai desert. The twin tablets may have been part of the text of the covenant, but they were not themselves miraculous.



Moses shatters the twin tablets, the 1st set that God made.



In Exodus God carves from stone the twin tablets and writes the 10 Commandments on them. When Moses then later shatters them in anger God makes Moses carve another set and then write on them. So the 2nd set was completely man-made and had nothing at all miraculous about them. Hardly a suitable candidate for the “Holy of Holies”



Babylonian kudurru of the late Kassite period found near Baghdad by the French botanist André Michaux. Kudurru was a type of stone document used as boundary stones and as records of land grants to vassals by the Kassites in ancient Babylonia between the 16th and 12th C. BCE. The word is Akkadian for "frontier" or "boundary" (cf. Hebrew "gader", fence, boundary).

Ancient legal contract



The relationship between the Covenant and the Pact or Testimony might be like the relationship between a marriage and the ring that signifies it. One is abstract, the other is concrete.

The Covenant was a sort of treaty between God and his people, with a similar contract form to that common to the neighbors of Israel, like the Hittites. It has several distinct parts to it.

A clear distinction is made in other places between the Covenant and the Testimony or Pact, which are different words – such as Psalms 25:10 – “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His Covenant and His Testimonies”. The Ark is never called the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus, but is always called the Ark of the Pact or Testimony, which is a different word. In Deuteronomy it is called the Ark of the Covenant, but at a later time.



"I WILL
NEVER BREAK
MY COVENANT
WITH YOU"
~Judges 2:1

The Covenant has several promises by God to the people of Israel and none are in the 10 Commandments, which only list the people's obligations. The twin tablets and the 10 words on them cannot be regarded as identical to the Covenant or to the Pact or Testimony that Exodus talks about, which is put in the Ark. They are sometimes called the tablets **of** the Pact or Testimony, and the Tent or Tabernacle is called the Tabernacle **of** the Pact or Testimony. At most they could be a sign or symbol of the Covenant. A stone from the sky would be a much more miraculous sign from God.

To Summarize –

The Covenant has several parts, like any treaty or contract.

The twin tablets with the 10 Commandments is just one part.

The Torah speaks of the Testimony or Pact as being not identical to the Covenant.

The Ark and the 2nd set of tablets were man-made. Yet the Ark and its contents had miraculous powers. Perhaps it was a miraculous meteorite that gave rise to that belief.

Exodus never says that the tablets were put into the Ark.

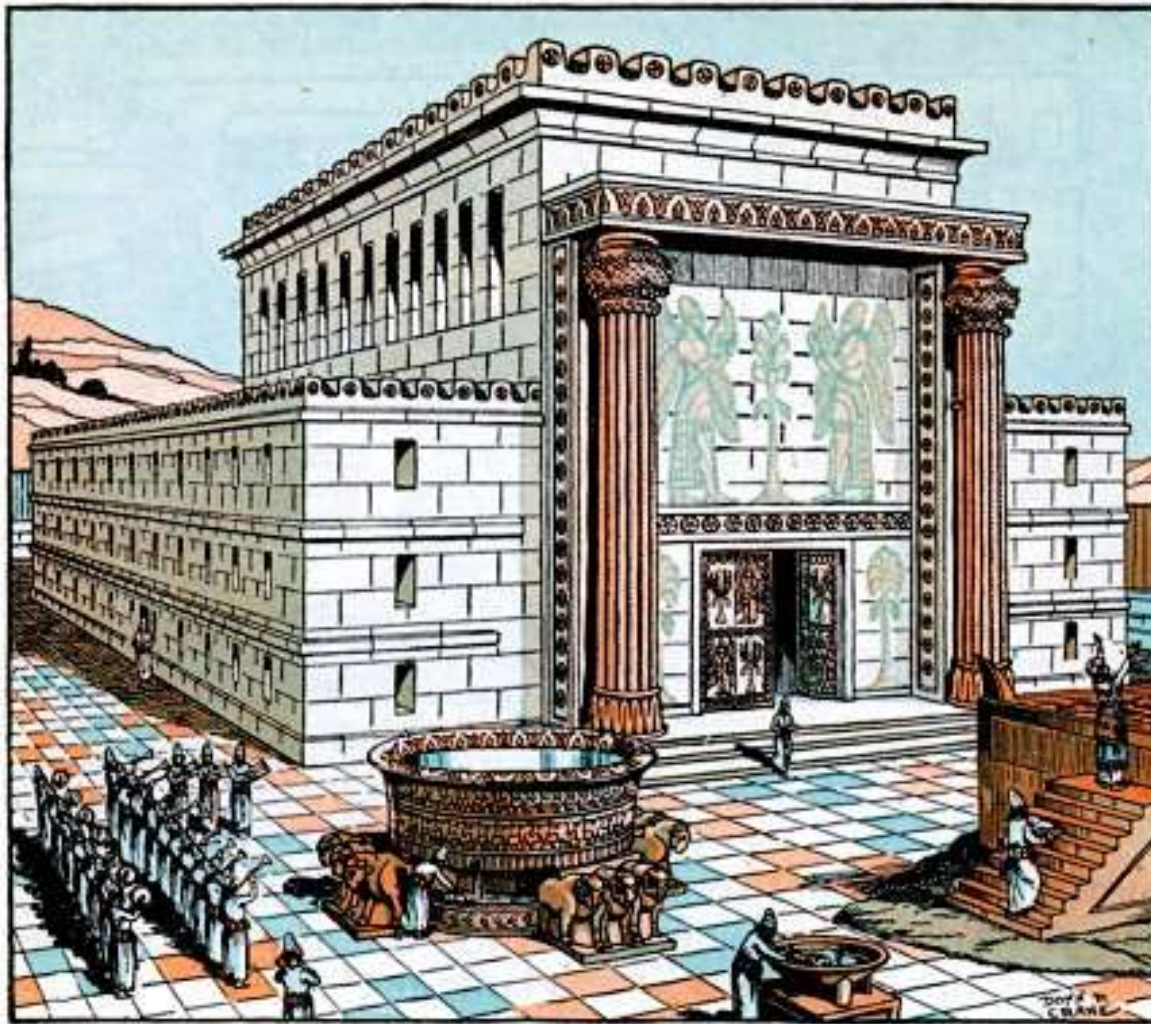
If all this is confusing then you have correctly understood it.



If this all seems like a lot of splitting of hairs then it is in the long tradition of very many centuries of Talmudic debate and analysis



My big conclusion, then, is that the Ark did not contain the twin tablets of the 10 Commandments but instead contained a sacred meteorite. Later accounts, like in Deuteronomy, were hundreds of year later than the construction of the Ark and cannot be trusted.

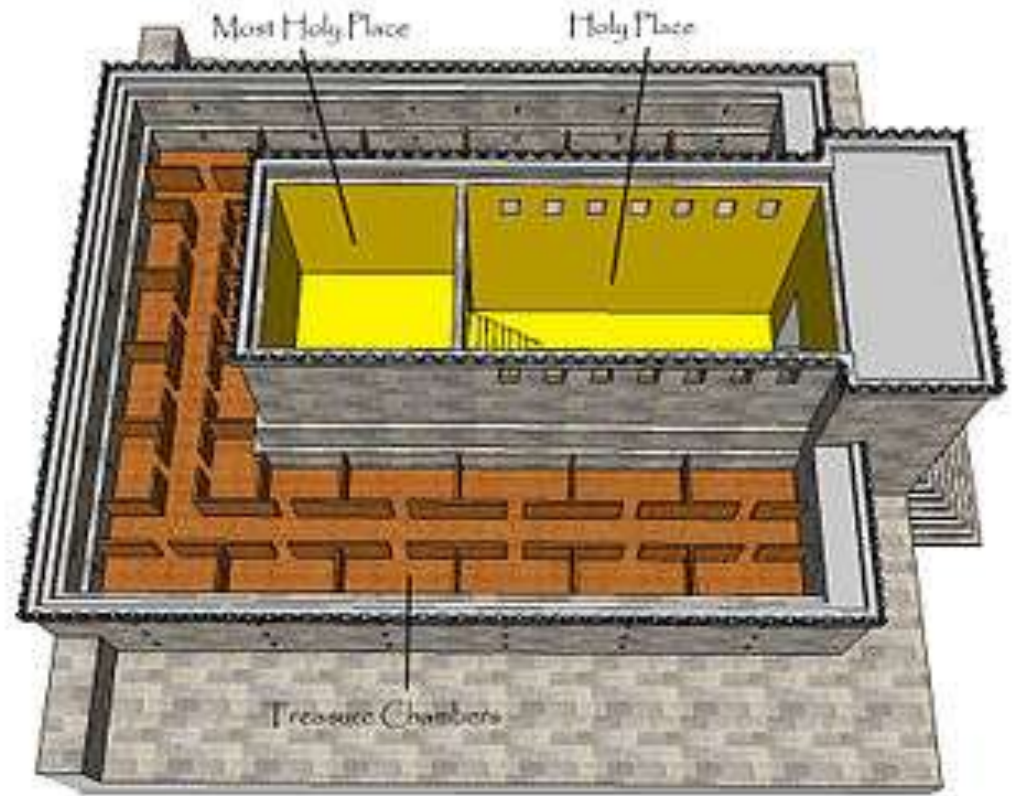


When Solomon built his great Temple (the 1st Temple) in 957 BCE, it was modeled after the Tabernacle that was in the desert. It contained the Ark of the Covenant. The temple was decorated with great opulence and there was much gold in it. It was, at the time, one of the wonders of the world.

The First Temple was the site of all important religious rituals, like sacrifices



King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem



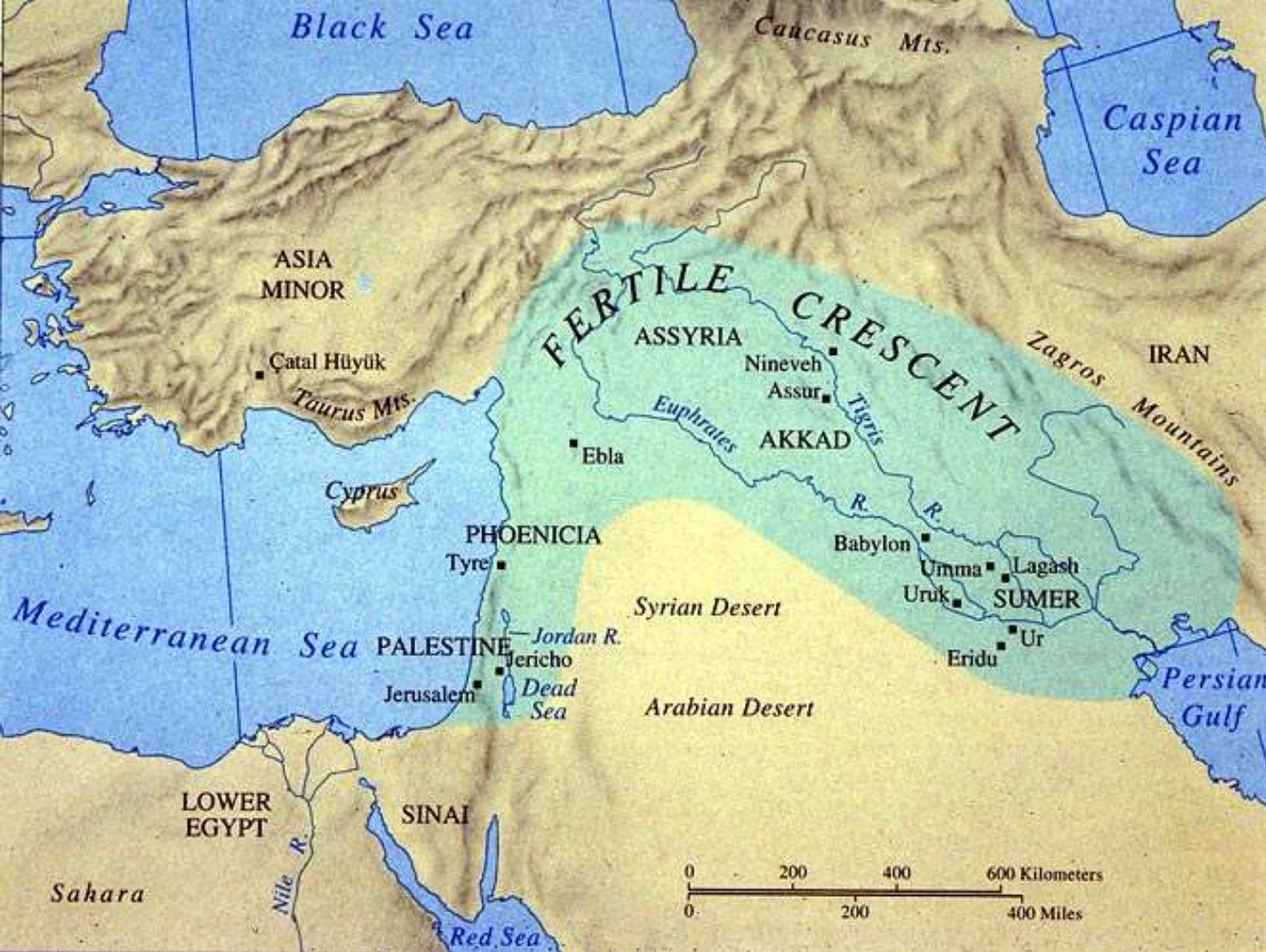
The Holy of Holies held the Ark of the Covenant until the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who invaded Israel.



The temple was looted of treasure, like the Ark, then the temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was sacked and the Jews enslaved and sent to Babylon for the Babylonian Captivity. This is when the Ark vanished from history. There is no further biblical mention of it.

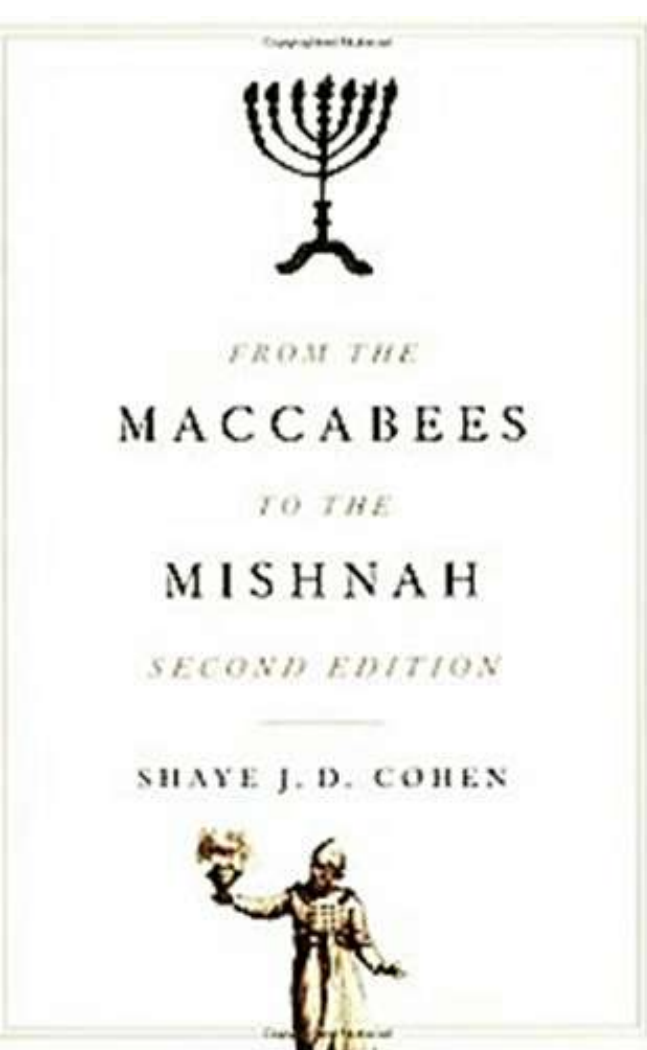


There are two theories about what happened to the Ark after the destruction of the 1st Temple. One is that it was hidden away in anticipation of the sacking of Jerusalem and the looting of the Temple's treasures. Maybe hidden under the Temple Mount, maybe taken elsewhere for safe keeping. The other is that it was taken as loot back to Babylon along with the other treasures from the Temple.



There are many theories about where the Ark might have ended up. When the Temple was looted, it and the other treasures might have been melted down for their gold. If it was saved by the Jews and hidden before the looting then it might be almost anywhere.

Some of the more distant locations that some have speculated about include Ethiopia and even the south of France – taken there by the Knights Templar after finding it in Jerusalem during one of the Crusades.



From 2nd Maccabees, Chapter 2

“And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and **the ark** and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it.”



1st and 2nd Maccabees are not part of either the Jewish or Protestant bibles but they are in the Catholic bible. They are the source of the Chanukah story and are regarded as a Jewish historical document. They date to about 124 BCE.



Here we will only look at one of these many theories about what happened to the Ark. There was a remarkable development in recent times that was related to the famous Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 11 remote caves between 1947 and 1956 near the shores of the Dead Sea. They date from around 150 BC to 70 AD. Most were written on parchment or papyrus and were protected all these years by the very dry climate.



10. הייתי בהטאי ועזותני לשאול ממינוי הנצילני
 11. §99§9 מרוב רחמייה וברוב צדקתייה גם אני את
 12. שמחה אהבתי ובצלחה חסיתי בוחרני עזבה יתקף
 13. לבי ועל חסדיכה אני נממכתי סלחה. §99§9 לחסאתי
 14. ומחירני מעזוני רוח אמונה דרעת חונני אל אתקלה
 15. בעודה אל תשלט בי ששן ורעה מנאה ממאוב ויצר
 16. רע אל ירשו בעצמי כי אתה. §99§9 שבחי ולטה קיוני
 17. כול היום ושמוח אחי עמי ובית אבי השומעים בחונכה
 18. | זלם אשמוחה בכה

1. כי לוא רמה תודה לכה ולוא תספר חסדיכה תרלעה
 2. חי חי יודה לכה יודה לכה מול מוטטי רגל בהודיעכה
 3. חסדיכה להנחה וצדקתכה תשמילם כי בורכה נפש מול
 4. חי נשמת מול בשאי אתה נתתה עשה עמנו §99§9
 5. משובבה מרוב רחמייה וברוב צדקתייה שמע
 6. §99§9 בקול אורבי שמו ולוא עזב חסדו מהמה
 7. ברוך §99§9 עשה צדקות מעטרי חסדיו
 8. חסד ורחמים שאנה נפשי להלל שמחה להודות מרנה
 9. חסדיכה להגיד אמונתכה לתהלתכה אין חקי למות

PSALMS
THEILLIM

The scrolls contain biblical texts, like this passage above from Psalms, and are the oldest known biblical text examples. One scroll of the many found was completely different, in many ways, from the rest. It is know as the Copper Scroll and was written on sheets of copper instead of parchment. The copper was corroded and the scroll had to be sliced into many sections in order to be able to open it up.



The Copper Scroll was actually two scrolls, rolled up like that shown on the right above. They were found in a pottery jar, shown at left here. Some of the sections it was sliced into are shown laid out and then a copy of the reassembled unrolled version is shown above that.

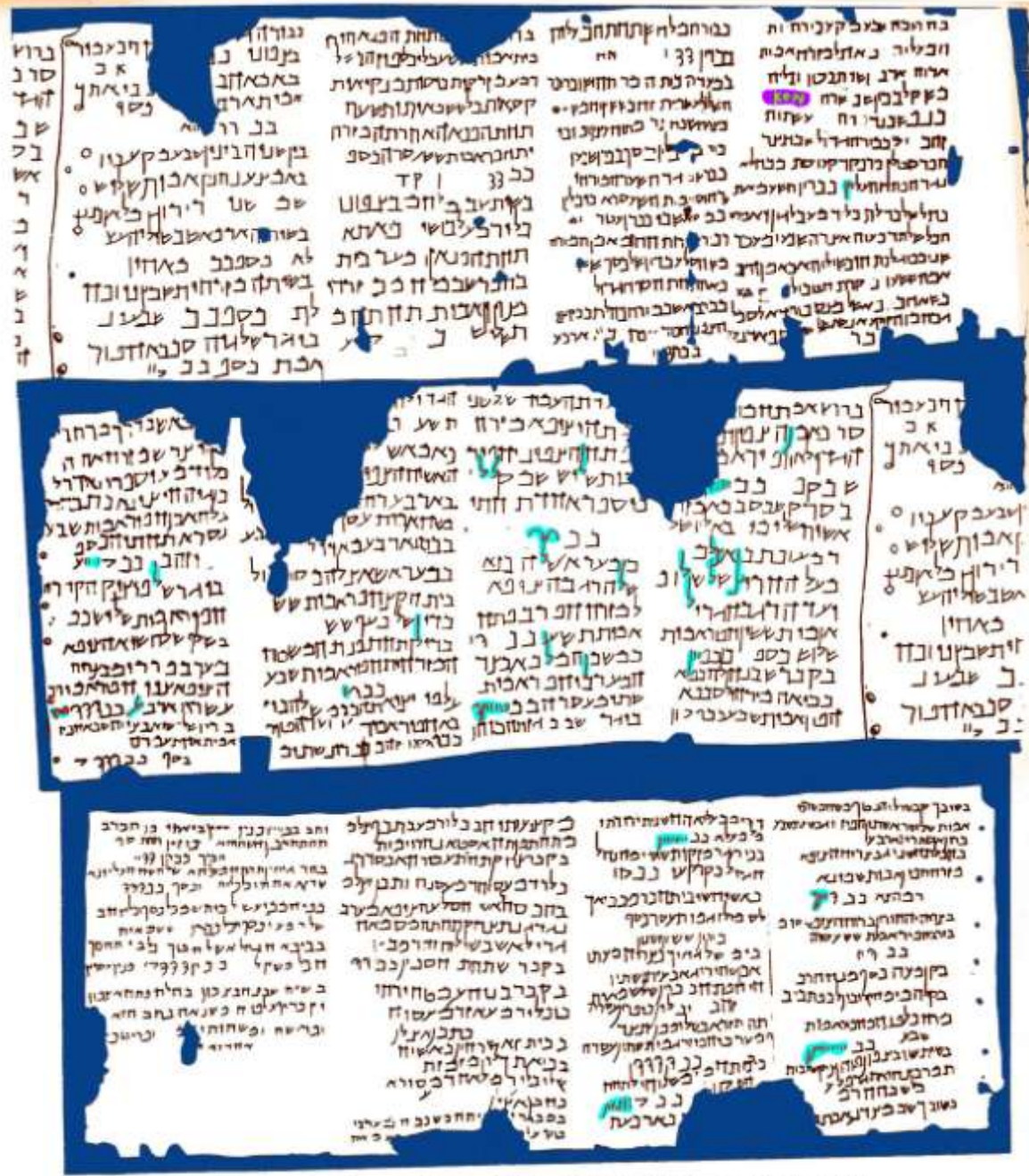


Once the copper scrolls had been sliced open some reassembled replicas were made, also in copper, to show what they looked like when new, 2000 years ago.



The text seems to have been made with a small hammer and chisel on the metal surface. We can only guess that metal was chosen instead of parchment writing to ensure that they lasted forever.

And now for the interesting part. Unlike all the other Dead Sea Scrolls, the Copper Scroll is not biblical texts but instead is a listing of fabulous treasures and their hidden locations in the ancient Israel. This might possibly include the Ark of the Covenant. One problem is that landmarks referred to may have either changed their names by now or be inaccessible (such as under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem).



Copie du texte des rouleaux, exécutée au 'College of Science and Technology' de Manchester

"In the fortress which is in the Vale of Achor, forty cubits under the steps entering to the east: a money chest and it's contents, of a weight of seventeen talents."

So begins the first column of the Copper Scroll, one of the most intriguing, and baffling, scrolls to be found among the collection known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Sounding like something out of an Indiana Jones movie, the text of the Copper Scroll (3Q15) describes vast amounts of buried treasure in several locations.

The landmarks directing where the treasures are may have been well-known to local people 2000 years ago but now are often obscure and puzzling.

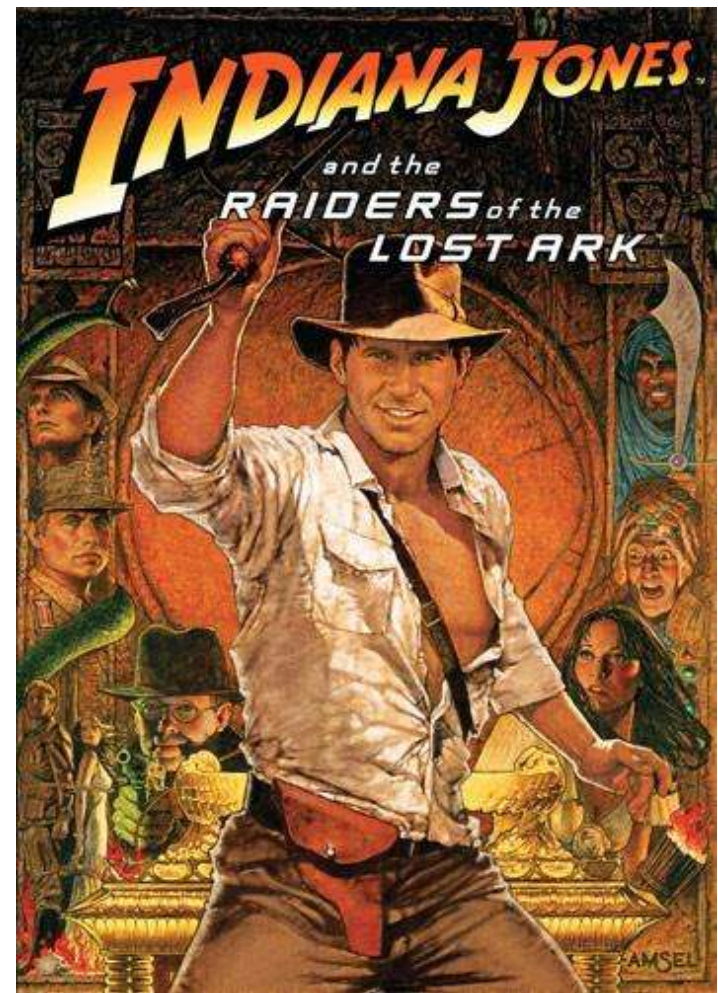




That reference to the Ark being put in a cave, in 2nd Maccabees, is about the same time as the Copper Scroll was written and placed in a cave. Interesting!



The treasure, spread out over many locations, might consist only of money (gold) and jewels and not include the Ark of the Covenant. Nobody knows yet.



A colorful figure who is part of the search for the treasures of the Copper Scrolls is the archaeologist Vendyl Jones, who claims to be the inspiration for the character Indiana Jones in that movie about the lost Ark. Steven Spielberg denies that and law suits were traded.



The search for the treasures indicated by those directions in the Copper Scrolls is a current on-going effort in Israel. We may or may not ever discover the Ark of the Covenant, if it still exists. What about the contents of the Ark, which may have been a sacred stone, a meteorite (the “Pact” between God and the Jews that is in the book of Exodus) – are there any ideas about that? I’m glad you asked – yes there are.



The Holy Grail is a famous icon of medieval Christianity. It is supposed to be a sacred cup with magic powers that was used by Jesus at the last supper or was used to catch his blood at the crucifixion. It plays an important role in the King Arthur and his knights saga. Nobody was thought to have ever seen it. Artists have guessed at it, like this chalice here.



The Grail was agreed upon to be a cup or chalice later on, but one of the earliest accounts was adamant that it was a stone, specifically a meteorite! Sound familiar?

The Grail first appeared in stories in the Middle Ages. Here it is shown in a tapestry, on the table. The earliest accounts of the Grail were quite uncertain as to what exactly it was. Later a large amount of Christian lore was attached to it but it may have been originally drawn from pagan Celtic mythology.



The Romance of the Knight Parzival, composed around 1225 by the German poet Wolfram Von Eschenbach, describes Parzival's quest for the Grail. He regards the Grail as a magic stone that fell from the sky (God) and calls it Lapis Exillis. Wolfram claims that one of his sources was an Arabic manuscript from a descendent of King Solomon (!!)(builder of the First Temple has housed the Ark of the Covenant).

Whether or not the Grail legend comes originally from some odd connection with the Ark and its contents, here we have another sacred meteorite story.

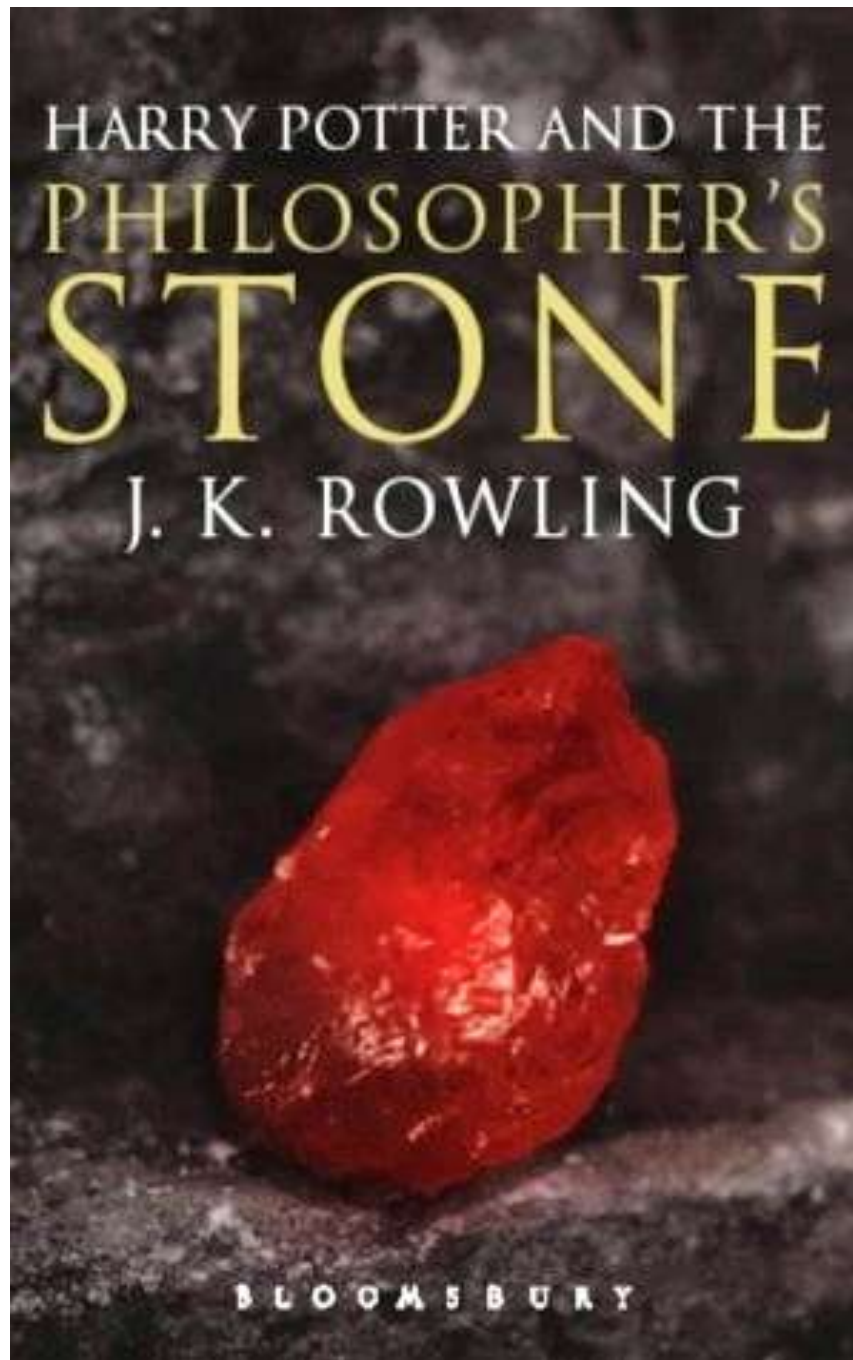


During the Crusades the Knights Templar sometimes took control of Jerusalem from the Moslems. They brought back to Europe many new ideas, from that cultural interchange. The Grail legend started around this time and may have been due to something seen or heard about in Jerusalem. The Ark might even have been found at that time and taken elsewhere by The Knights Templar.



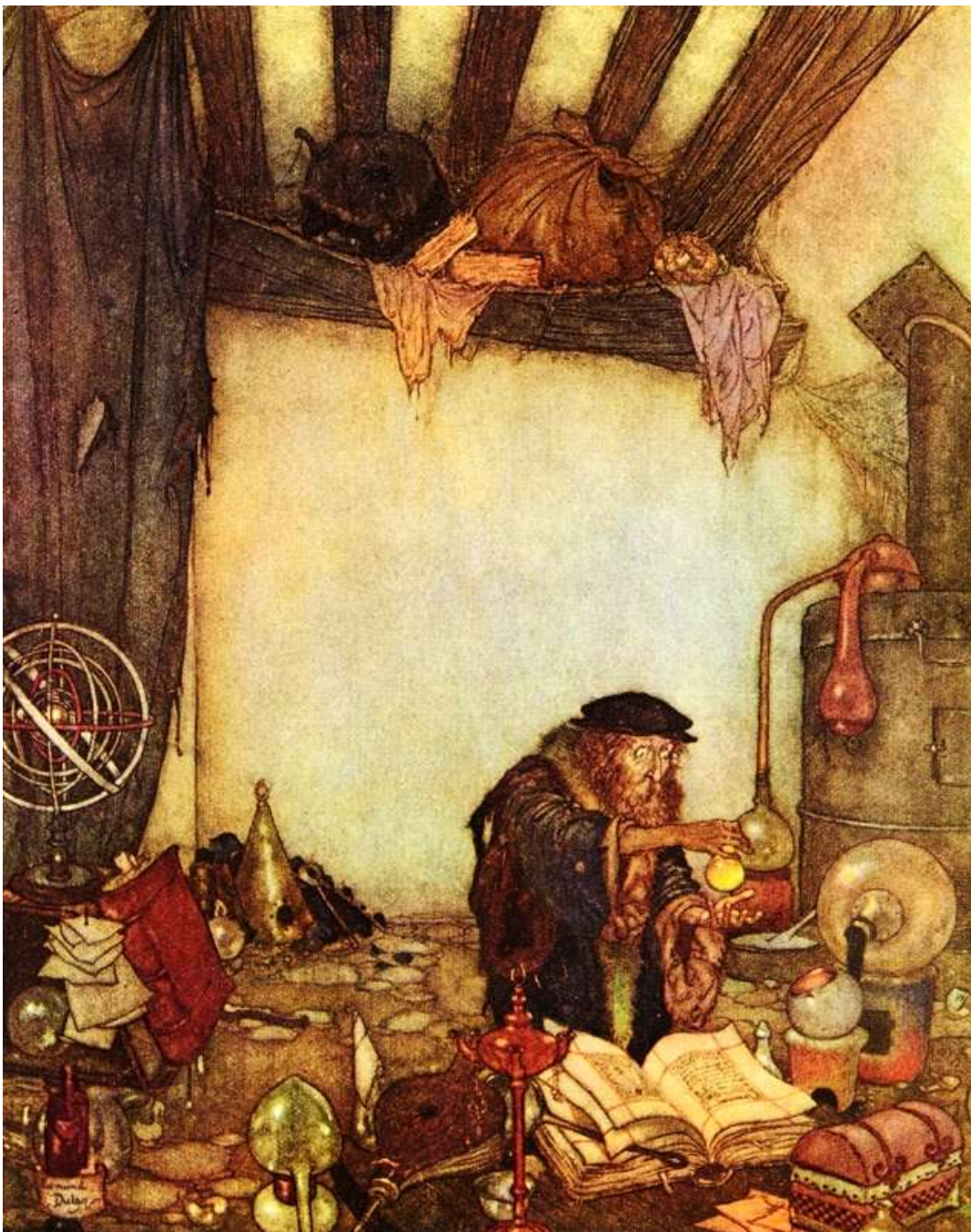
And then things start to get really weird, with secret societies and some really esoteric stuff. So we will quit here, before things get silly. Monty Python has already covered that well with their Grail movie.

But there is one more aspect of miraculous meteorites that is far more ancient than either the Holy Grail or the Ark of the Covenant's contents. It is the Philosopher's Stone and its evolution over thousands of years.



The Harry Potter book shown here was published first in England. Then it came out in America with the different title of “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” They probably figured that we Americans were too stupid to know what a philosopher is so they changed it to sorcerer.

In medieval times a Philosopher’s Stone was a much sought after magic aid in alchemy, for turning lead into gold.



The miraculous Philosopher's Stone, so central to alchemy, had many magical properties. It could cure all illnesses, make its holder invisible, also invulnerable in battle, as well as turn metals into gold.

Pre-historic blacksmiths were as important as priests because they could produce iron, not gold. Why was that so special?

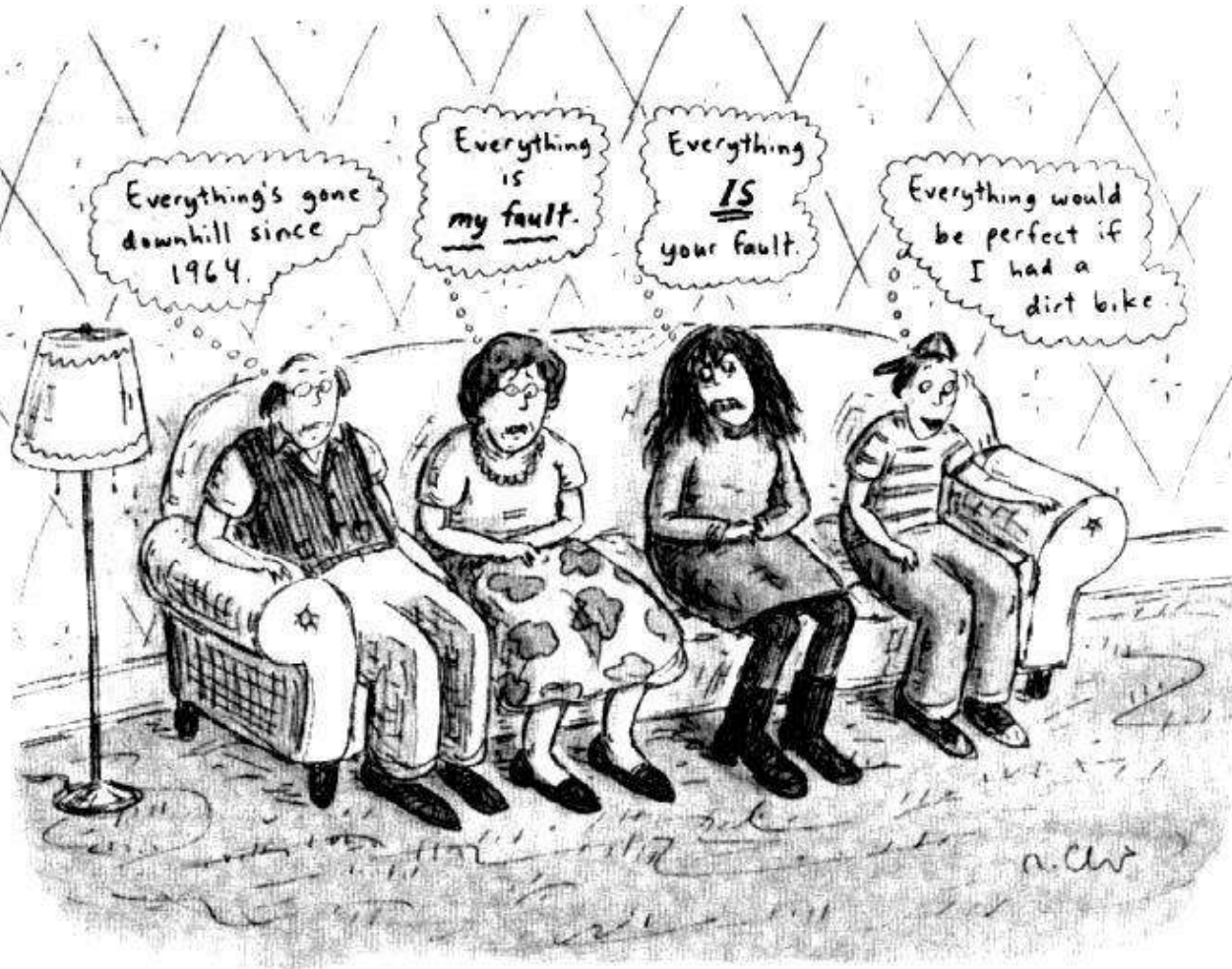


Meteor plunging to earth. Iron meteorite

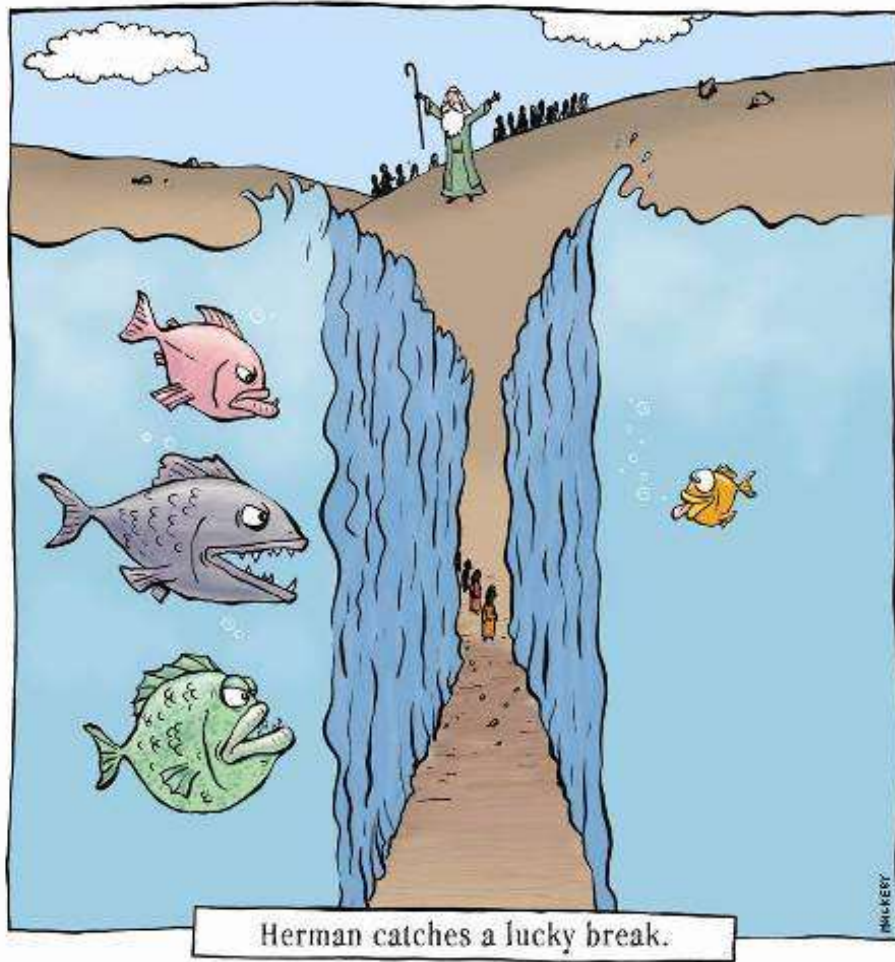
Thousands of years ago terrestrial iron was unknown and iron smelting from ore had yet to be invented. Yet there were some very rare iron knives, spear points, etc. All of it came from the iron in meteorites, the only source of iron known back then. When Cortez asked Aztec chiefs where they got their iron knives they simply pointed to the sky. Iron was unknown to Moses (pre-Iron Age) except in the form of meteorites.

The ancient Sumerian word for iron translates as “sky-fire” or meteorite. Iron was very much harder than brass or copper so it was regarded as a miraculous gift from the sky (or God). No wonder it was thought to have magic powers.

THEORIES OF EVERYTHING



My theory of everything = The contents of the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy Grail of Christianity, and the Philosopher's Stone of alchemy and antiquity are all either real or else imagined meteorites. (Also Kryptonite in Superman comics). All were considered to have many miraculous powers.

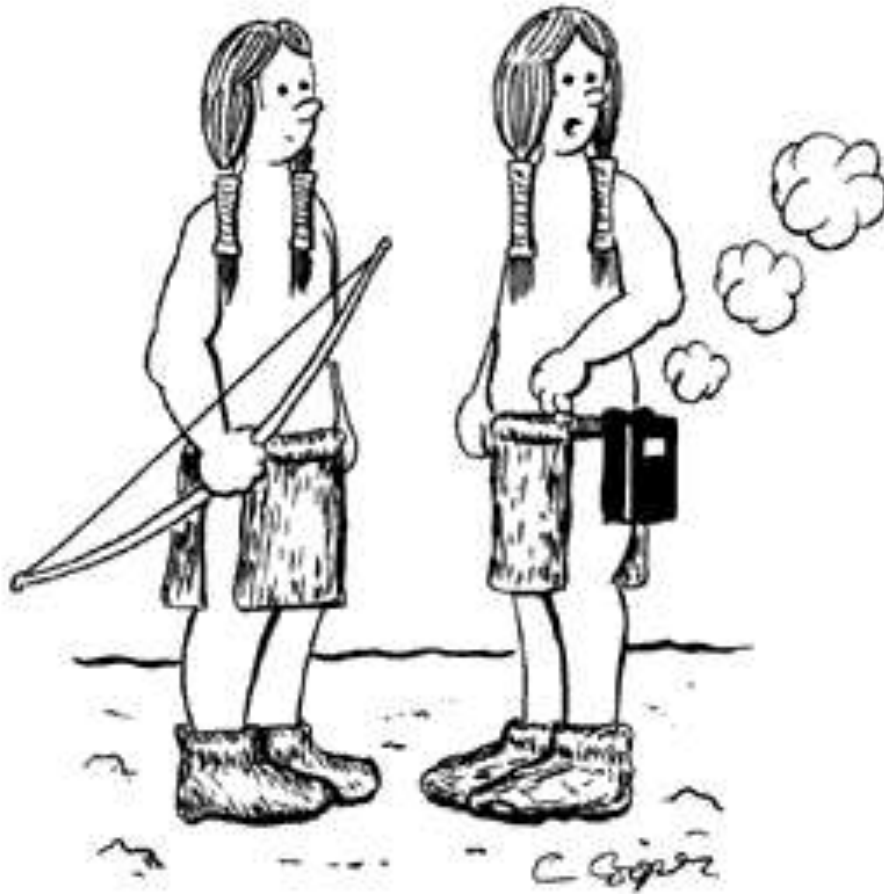


How good is the credibility of ancient sources, like the Copper Scrolls, the Book of Maccabees, etc.? There are many un-supernatural ways to explain many of the biblical “miracles” and often the popular imagination has a conception of these unlikely “miracles” that is more expansive than what the ancient sources actually say. Moses parting the waters did not have to look as extreme as this kind of image here.



We often assume that people back then could not have been all that smart, compared to our brilliance today. Just one example of how stupid they were:

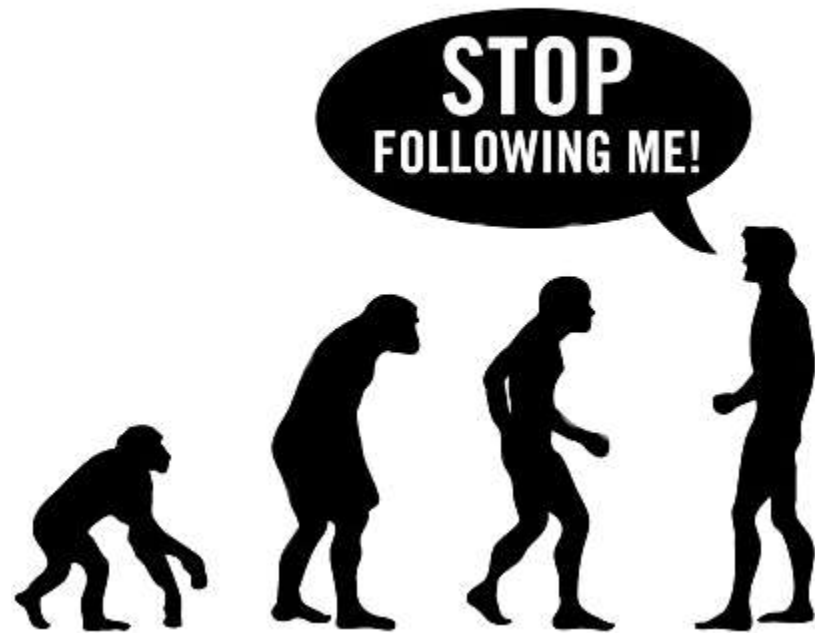
They thought that they were living in the present, while it is clear to any fool today that they were living in the past. (joke).



We often assume that people with more primitive technology than us are somehow less intelligent, more gullible, etc.

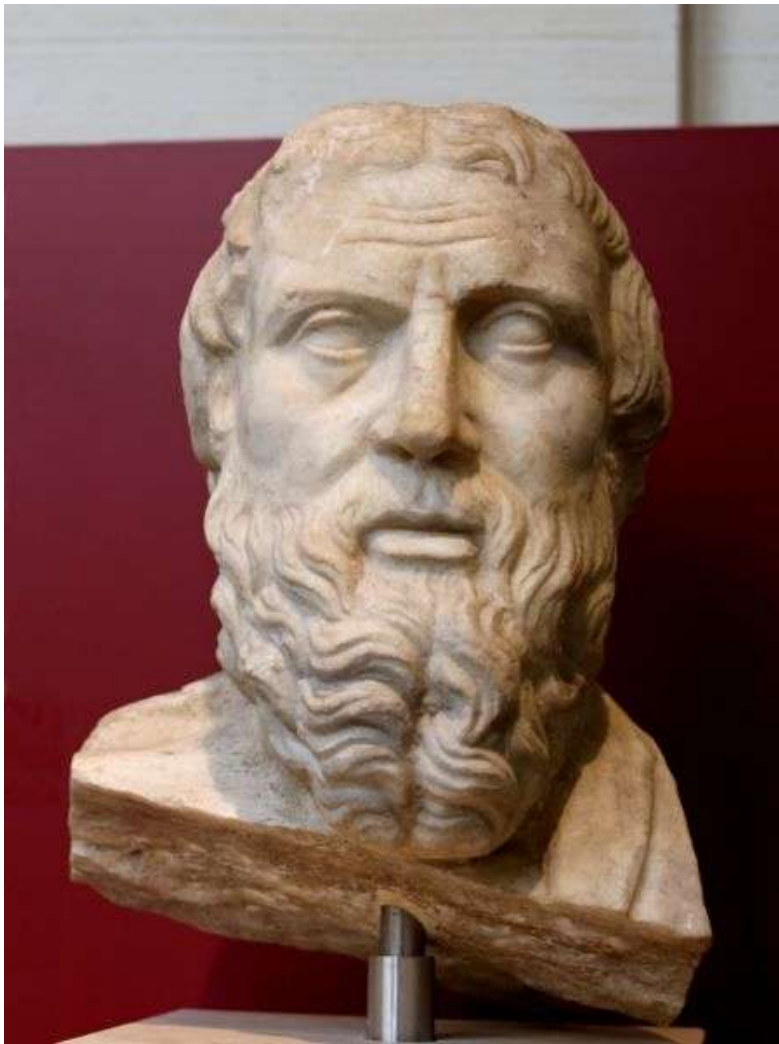
How should we deal with ancient accounts that seem highly suspect – such as “miraculous” or highly unlikely? There are some useful rules that can help.

“Excuse me. I have to answer my beeper.”



Ancient accounts that portray one group of people as more advanced, less savage, etc. than other groups should be considered as most likely propaganda to justify genocide, the taking of land, etc., although there may be some truth in it.





Herodotus

The ancient accounts most likely to be true or largely true will not have value judgments in them (i.e., propaganda) and will describe something as it would have been understood back then. We can often separate **what** is being described (likely to be true) from **how** they thought it was being done (by gods, etc. and therefore probably false).

Let us take a famous example from Herodotus, the Greek “father of history”, from 2500 years ago and apply this idea.



Herodotus traveled to Egypt, and other remote places and brought back accounts of things he had personally observed as well as stories he had heard. He was skeptical of outlandish sounding tales and tried to have several independent accounts of the same thing.

One account he gave is how the people in India had acquired so much gold. This was by hearsay and has been usually taken as a perfect example of how worthless ancient accounts can be.





The story elements:

- 1) Enormous ants, clearly impossible
- 2) Gold dug up without human efforts – a pleasant fantasy
- 3) Therefore a ridiculous fable, with no factual value

Here 2) is the **What** and 1) is the **How**

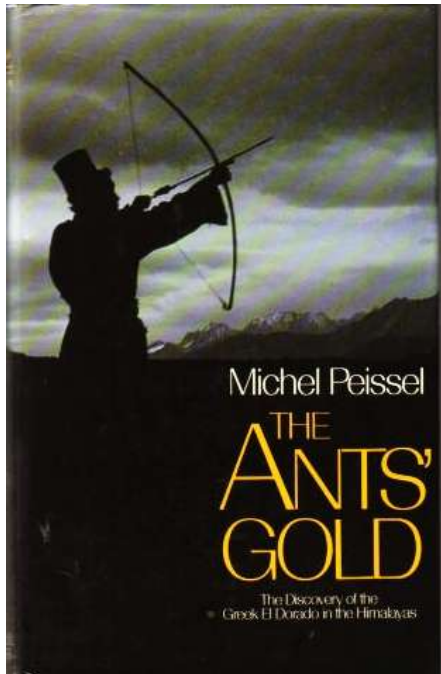
The story that Herodotus had heard several times was that giant ants burrowed into the ground and brought back gold to the surface, from a desert region rich in gold. People then could just scoop this up with no effort on their part. Furthermore these were not ordinary ants but were larger than a fox and smaller than a dog. The Persians as well as Indians told this same story.

Let us reject the **how** and keep the **what** and see what happens.



The New York Times reported that in the 1990's a remote area of the Himalayan mountains in the India/Pakistan border was found where marmots (sort of prairie dogs) throw up lots of gold dust to the surface of their burrows and the remote local tribe scoops up the gold. Furthermore, the word in Persian for "marmot" is equivalent to "mountain ant"

There are many other examples of ancient tales that seems preposterous and yet often the kernel of truth can be extracted with the right approach.



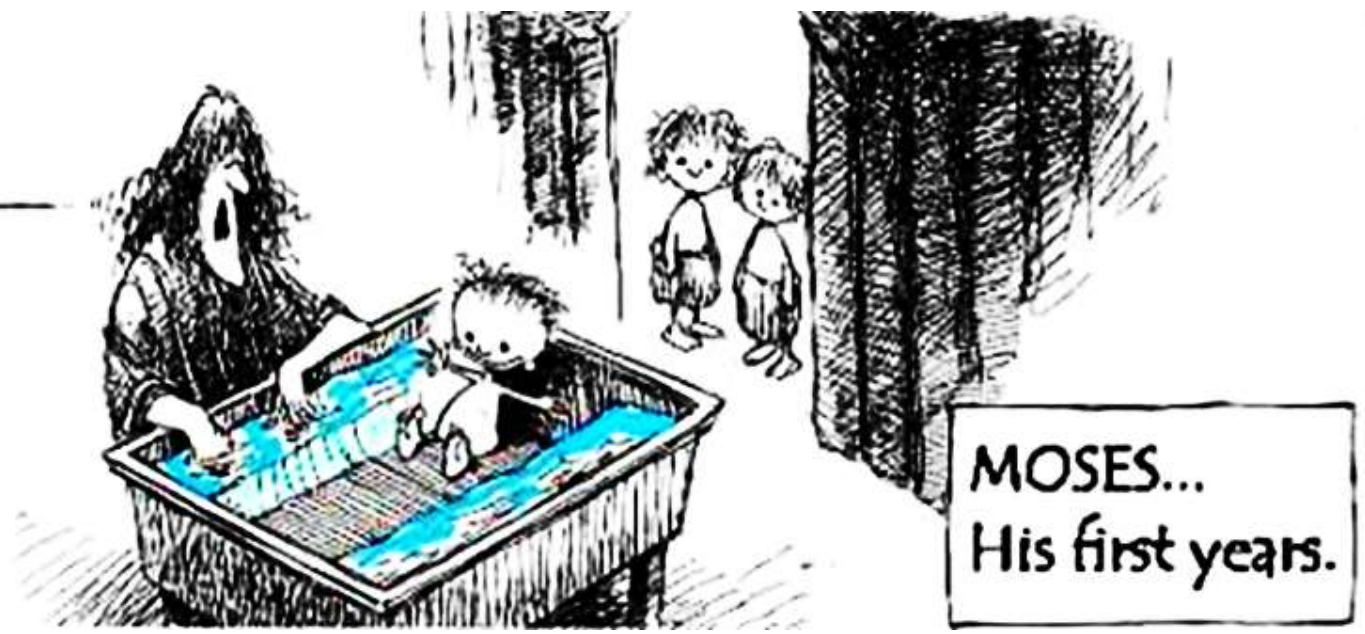


All of the Hebrew bible was transmitted orally for hundreds of years, much more in some cases, before ever being written down. How accurate is the oral transmission of stories? It varies, of course.

But there is a Native American tribe in the Pacific northwest that has various myths about a nearby mountain. The myths clearly describe a volcanic eruption, although not in modern scientific terms.

Recently an ethnologist thought to ask geologists if the mountain had ever been a volcano. The answer – yes, 8,000 years ago! And the memory was preserved by this illiterate group over many millenia.

MOSES !!!
Cut the
bullshit
and take
your bath!



MEY 7-25

Heroic figures, real and mythical, often have many life details that are the same. This is not a coincidence, it is myth-making at work. One common theme is a child of royalty who is sent off to be killed by a jealous king, but is spared by the kindly woodsman, etc. and given to a humble peasant couple to rear to adulthood. Then his true royal identity is revealed. Almost all of the details of Moses' life conform to the parts of this heroic life myth, such as that no one knows where his grave is. But one part of Moses' life is the reverse of the usual – he was born of slaves and raised in the Pharaoh's palace. Freud thought that this departure from the normal mythic pattern preserves a kernel of historical truth. This is another way to extract truth from myth.

OTTO RANK



The Myth of the Birth of the Hero

*A Psychological
Exploration of Myth*

EXPANDED AND UPDATED EDITION

Translated by Gregory C. Richter, Ph.D.,
and E. James Lieberman, M.D.

With an Introductory Essay by Robert A. Segal, Ph.D.

IN QUEST OF THE HERO



*The Myth of the Birth
of the Hero,
by Otto Rank*

*The Hero: A Study in
Tradition, Myth, and
Drama, Part II,
by Lord Raglan*

*The Hero Pattern and
the Life of Jesus,
by Alan Dundes*

*With an Introduction
by Robert A. Segal*

There are many similarities in the lives of Moses, David, Oedipus, Jesus, Siegfried, Hercules, etc. These are probably mythic similarities, not based on fact, such as unusual birth circumstances. Virgin birth, baby in an ark in water, born in a manger, etc.



Other heroic figures from the distant past were also plucked as babes from the water, like Moses, but none were of humble birth as he was. The Dahesh Museum in Manhattan is full of paintings like this.



In summary, it is hard to know how much to believe about the Ark of the Covenant - its existence and eventual fate. But to dismiss out of hand the Ark as a biblical fantasy seems quite unwarranted. We don't have to believe in the Ark's supposed magic powers to think that people back then probably believed it. Archeology is continuing to find fresh proof that many factual type details in the bible are correct. This in no way implies anything about the theological content of the bible, simply that ancient records should be given a fair hearing and interpreted as how things were understood at the time, back then.