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"Moses as High Priest and Sorcerer? A Response to Graham Hancock's Egyptian Explanation for the Ark of the Covenant"

Until Paramount released the motion picture *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in 1981, scant interest was directed toward the fate of the ark of the covenant. Scholarly study of the Ark focused primarily on the ark narratives in II Samuel and the object's place in the Israelite cult. Little has changed in the last decade among Old Testament scholars, most of whom scoff at the idea that the ark could have survived Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem, much less be an attainable prize for modern archaeology. In the popular arena, however, the discussion of what may have happened to the ark has recently been enlivened by British journalist Graham Hancock's book *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant* (Crown, 1992). Hancock's book is approaching bestseller status, and his views on the ark of the covenant have been featured on several television specials, most notably National Geographic's *Explorer* series. The purpose of this paper is not to comment on the viability of Hancock's answer as to the fate of the ark of the covenant. Rather, I intend to focus on several of the assertions Hancock makes on the way to his final solution. My particular contention is that Hancock's explanation of the character of the ark, his portrait of the prophet Moses, and his hypothesis for the origin of the ark are the product of misdirected research steered by manipulation of the biblical data, fallacious linguistical evidence, and consistently faulty logic.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

It is important at the outset to highlight several presuppositions Hancock brought to his study of the ark of the covenant. First, Hancock repeatedly assumes that the ark *itself* had unusual powers.¹ For example, Hancock opines that the dramatic death of Uzzah (II Sam. 6:6) came as a result of his ignorance in mishandling an inherently dangerous *object*. While discussing this event, Hancock very plainly asserts that Uzzah died not as a result of any divine judgment, as the text clearly indicates, but rather as a result of being struck down *by the ark*.² The slaying of the men at Beth-Shemesh for "looking into the ark" is another case in point. Again, the author boldly asserts that it was the *ark* that killed these individuals, contrary to the statement of I Sam. 6:19.³

The reason Hancock feels at liberty to ignore the statements of the biblical text concerning events associated with the ark is that he resolutely rejects the biblical idea that the ark was dreaded because the God of Israel had placed His presence upon it. Indeed, the awesome powers of the ark of the covenant left Hancock, to use his own term, "perplexed."⁴ He could not accept the Old Testament

¹Here Hancock is referring to sometimes dramatic events that occur in the presence of the ark, such as fire (Lev. 10:2; this assumes that the fire here came from the ark, but see the footnote below), boils (I Sam. 5,6), and even death (II Sam. 6).

²Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1992, p. 340. That Uzzah was killed *by the ark* is an argument without regard to the words of II Sam. 6:7. Hancock offers no exegetical support, choosing only to proof-text the passage while forcing his own presupposition upon the biblical account. It should also be noted here that it is only speculation that Uzzah was killed *because he touched the ark*. The Old Testament does not actually contain a command against touching the ark (though there are several warnings to individuals to stay clear of it), nor is there ever a specific punishment delineated in the legal code of Israel for touching the ark.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 282, 340, 554 (footnote number 56). Other examples, according to Hancock, would be the fall of the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6; although the text never even alludes to the ark being responsible), and the tumors or boils with which the Philistines were afflicted after they captured the ark (I Sam. 5:8-6:12). The point is that there is no indication in the text that the ark had powers of its own.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.285.

record that the God of Israel was the source of these powers, since to do so would mean believing that "Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, was a psychopathic killer - or a kind of malign genie who lived in a box."⁵ Unable to accept a divine explanation, Hancock chose an alternative:

I therefore formulated the following hypothesis: the Old Testament had indeed been both right and wrong at the same time. The Ark had possessed genuine powers, but those powers had been neither supernatural nor divine; on the contrary, they must have been the products of human skill and ingenuity.⁶

This rejection of the possibility of divine activity is Hancock's second major presupposition. For him the ark was nothing more than a "monstrous instrument" which the Israelites "were able to use . . . as a weapon," the powers of which were ignorantly assumed to be supernatural.⁷ It is certainly common for critical students of the Old Testament to attribute the Israelite belief in divine help to ancient superstition. In Hancock's case, this prejudice allows him to contend that, in passages where the text clearly indicates that the ark and the presence of Yahweh were virtually indistinguishable to the Israelites, the Israelites were simply ignorant that the ark was actually a deadly machine.⁸ The Israelites naturally thought that the physical powers of the ark were the activities of Yahweh, who had placed his presence upon the ark. In this belief, however, they were mistaken. Put another way, since the Israelites had seen the powers of the ark firsthand, they must have believed the ark *contained* their god.⁹ Ironically, Hancock's second presupposition is helpful in demonstrating the weakness of his overall understanding of the ark of the covenant, for it drives him to conclusions so imaginative that arguments from silence become his only means of defense.

HANCOCK'S ARK OF THE COVENANT: ISRAEL'S SECRET WEAPON

Having established to his own satisfaction that the ark was nothing more than a piece of military hardware, Hancock proceeds to credit it with the entire conquest of Canaan. Concerning the ark's assumed role during this period he writes: ". . . the Ark was nigh-on invincible, and during Joshua's campaigns in the Promised Land the biblical testimony suggests that it continued to play a significant military role long after the fall of Jericho."¹⁰ Elsewhere he adds:

Under [Moses] leadership and with the help of the Ark [the Israelites] successfully subdued the fierce tribes of the Sinai peninsula, conquered Transjordan, spoiled the Midianites, and generally laid waste to all those who opposed them.¹¹

Such statements give the impression that the Scripture is brimming with accounts of the ark's military prowess during this time, but such is not the case. In fact, the Old Testament conquest accounts fail to even imply that the ark played any role of *aggression* at Jericho or anywhere else. Incredibly, the

⁵Ibid., p. 286.

⁶Ibid., p. 287.

⁷Ibid., pp. 273, 276, 275.

⁸cf. Num. 10:35 for example.

⁹see Hancock's comment on page 293, made in conjunction with footnote 98 of that chapter: ". . . the 'Tablets of the Testimony' that had supposedly been lodged inside the Ark of the Covenant and that the Israelites *had regarded as embodying their God*."

¹⁰Hancock, pp. 278-279.

¹¹Ibid., p. 277.

ark is never even *mentioned* in the passages that describe the defeat of the enemies which Hancock lists in the latter quotation.¹² An examination of the texts that refer to the ark of the covenant reveals that the Israelites never *used* the ark in any way. One never reads, for example, of the ark being "pointed" at Israel's enemies as though it had some innate capabilities; nor is there any biblical evidence that the ark ever emitted any energy, much less than for the Israelites having the ability to wield the ark at will.¹³ Rather, the Scripture simply records decisions of Yahweh to intervene on behalf of His children, and in a variety of ways at that.¹⁴ The ark is never said to "do" anything; its presence at Jericho and elsewhere is incidental, since Israel's victories resulted not from the fact that the ark its own had destructive powers, but because the God who fought for Israel had chosen to associate Himself with it.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Hancock does not hesitate to make assertions to the contrary wherever necessary in his efforts to convince us of the purely mechanical character of the ark.

Not only does the Hancock believe that the ark served to defeat the enemies of Israel, he also contends that Moses deliberately used it against his own people to keep them in line. In Hancock's understanding:

[The Ark] was a portable miracle machine which Moses used to ensure that the people would obey him no matter how difficult the circumstances . . . Examples of the sacred object being used in precisely this manner are not hard to find in the Bible. Indeed a dramatic change appears to have taken place in Moses' behaviour after the building of the Ark . . . [after this event] whenever the people grumbled, rebelled against him, or dared to dispute his leadership in any way he simply turned the Ark on them - with predictably dreadful results.

On one fairly typical occasion he used it to inflict a disfiguring skin condition on his sister Miriam because she had defied his authority. The Bible calls this skin condition 'leprosy'. When Miriam was suitably chastened, however, her sores vanished. Since they had appeared in the first place immediately after she had been exposed to the mysterious cloud that sometimes issued forth from between the two cherubim mounted on the Ark's lid, it is unlikely that they were actually caused by leprosy. Might they not have been induced by some chemical or other contaminant released from the Ark itself?¹⁶

Hancock's assertions are riddled with problems. An unbiased reading of the Miriam incident (Num. 12:1-15) highlights Hancock's propensity for inserting his own data into the biblical account. Numbers 12:3, for instance, tells us that Moses' reaction was not vindictive, for he was very meek in spirit. Obviously Hancock could contend that this was a later gloss of an unfavorable act on Moses' part, but one would have to wonder why the presumed scribe who tidied up this historical blemish missed others that attributed fierce anger to Moses.¹⁷ Instead, he ignores this verse in his discussion. More importantly, however, note the words of Numbers 12:5-6 (ASV):

¹²cf. Numbers 31:2-11; 22:1

¹³Hancock does quote Louis Ginzberg's book *Legends of the Jews* for support that the ark emitted energy (see Hancock, p 552, footnotes 13, 17, 20, and 21 for example), but offers no biblical support.

¹⁴e.g., sound military advice to Joshua (Josh. 8:1-3), circling the walls of Jericho and blowing trumpets (Josh. 6:1-20), and hailstones (Josh. 10:10-11).

¹⁵The ark is only part of the narrative because that was the immediate locale of the presence of God - the real "weapon". Interestingly, the one time when the Israelites seemed to trust the object itself, their military venture failed miserably (cf. I Sam 4:13 - "And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when *it* cometh among us, *it* may save us out of the hand of our enemies.").

¹⁶Hancock, p. 342.

¹⁷for example, Ex. 16:20; Numbers 20:1-10; 11:10; 31:14; and 16:15 (the Korah passage, which Hancock himself uses)

And Jehovah came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forth. 6 And he said, Hear now my words: if there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known unto him in a vision, I will speak with him in a dream. 7 My servant Moses is not so; he is faithful in all my house: 8 with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the form of Jehovah shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses? 9 And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against them; and he departed. 10 And the cloud removed from over the Tent; and, behold, Miriam was leprous, as (white as) snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.

It is hard to explain why Hancock would contend so forcefully that the Ark was responsible for Miriam's leprosy given that it is nowhere mentioned in connection with her judgment. He of course is assuming that the cloud mentioned in the passage is the same as that which hovered over the mercy seat on occasion (cf. Lev. 16:2). I can concede this equation, but the conclusions Hancock draws from it are without merit. First, the cloud never touched Miriam, so it cannot be argued that the Ark had doused her with some "chemical contaminant". Second, the meeting took place at the doorway of the tabernacle. The ark, you will recall, was kept behind a veil (the same one Hancock will *later* argue was designed to *keep the energy of the ark contained* - along with the ark's rather heavy lid).¹⁸ This would mean that either this gaseous ("chemical") cloud had somehow escaped containment (and one would wonder at this point why only Miriam suffered any effects), or the cloud was *not* some power source emanating from the weapon referred to as the ark, but was instead just what the biblical text describes - a visible manifestation of Yahweh's presence. Lastly, Hancock never addresses the audible voice accompanying the cloud (an oversight he commits in all the other passages he cites).¹⁹

Another example, Hancock alleges, is the account of Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-35). Upon challenging Moses' authority, Moses' came up with a brilliant plan to lure the unwitting malcontents into a duel with the Ark. Moses' convinced each of the rebels, so Hancock explains, to offer incense before the Ark. Once they were within range, Moses used the Ark to annihilate them.²⁰

Hancock's interpretation of the Korah tragedy is terribly misguided. Consider the account in Numbers 16:16-33 (ASV) to which he refers:

Num 16:16 And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before Jehovah, thou, and they, and Aaron, to-morrow: 17 and take ye every man his censer, and put incense upon them, and bring ye before Jehovah every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each his censer. 18 And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood at the door of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. 19 And Korah assembled all the congregation against them unto the door of the tent of meeting: and the glory of Jehovah appeared unto all the congregation. 20 And Jehovah spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 21 Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. 22 And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? 23 And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, 24 Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. 25 And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. 26 And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. 27 So they gat them up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood at the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little ones. 28 And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that Jehovah hath sent me to do all these works; for (I have) not (done them) of mine own mind. 29 If these men die the common death of all men, or

¹⁸Hancock, pp. 353, 354; see Ex. 40:3,21; Num. 4:5.

¹⁹As we shall see, Hancock does not shy from contending that Moses was a magician who had secret technological knowledge passed on to him by his Egyptian tutors which he used to build the ark. Perhaps Moses' training in Egypt included ventriloquism.

²⁰Ibid., pp.342-343, 567 (see footnotes 116 and 121).

if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then Jehovah hath not sent me. 30 But if Jehovah make a new thing, and the ground open its mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down alive into Sheol; then ye shall understand that these men have despised Jehovah. 31 And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them; 32 and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. 33 So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into Sheol: and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly.

Again, the ark of the covenant is not specifically mentioned in the passage, but Hancock seeks to place Korah and his compatriots in the proximity of the ark, using certain features of the passage that imply this. In this regard Hancock attempts to create a parallel with the offering of the incense in censers here to the Nadab and Abihu debacle: "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his *censer*, and put fire therein, and *laid incense* thereon, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he had not commanded them (ASV, italics mine)." It is Hancock's contention that the ark had killed Nadab and Abihu from behind the veil while they stood at the altar of incense inside the Holy Place. The reference to censers of incense in the Korah passage allow Hancock to credit the ark with a mass execution engineered, of course, by Moses. Additionally, the appearance of Jehovah in the account (16:19) allows Hancock to speculate that the ark's mysterious energy (chemical?) cloud was present when Moses' enemies met their fate.

One is not compelled to conclude that the fire which "came forth from Jehovah" (Lev. 10:2) and killed Nadab and Abihu came from the ark.²¹ For the sake of this analysis of Hancock's interpretation, I will agree with this assumption, for it lends no weight to Hancock's interpretation. On one hand, it is unmistakably clear that the location where Korah and his followers *would have offered* their incense was at the altar of incense inside the Holy Place.²² On the other hand, Hancock fails to note the *location* of the altar of incense in proximity to where this violent event transpired. A close reading of Numbers 16:16-33 reveals that Korah and his followers *never even entered* the Holy Place, and hence could not have been standing near the altar of incense, which was positioned in front of the ark of the covenant, but separated from it by the heavy veil that blocked the entrance to the Holy of Holies.²³ Rather, Korah and his followers met their doom at "the door of the tent of meeting" (Num. 16:18,19).²⁴ The practical importance of noting their location with precision is that the whole Korah tragedy took place at most likely the same place where Miriam was judged. As a result, the same problems that occur with Hancock's assertion that the ark was responsible for Miriam's condition could be noted here. Had the energy source of the ark escaped the protective veil and gold lid? After all, Moses was in plain view, not "at the controls," so to speak. Why were only Korah and his followers killed? Why weren't they struck with leprosy? How did the ark make the earth open, and why did it choose to kill this way in only this account? And, again, what about the audible voice? Moreover, if this event did occur in proximity to the ark, why wasn't a good portion of the tabernacle destroyed when the earth opened underneath it to swallow 250 men (Num. 16:2)? The apparent "gaseous chemical leak" (recall the appearance of "the glory of Jehovah" in verse 19; i.e., the cloud) is even more puzzling this time around because not only did it accurately target the men who vied with Moses, it also managed to open the earth underneath their families (cf. verse 27, 32-33). Certainly Hancock could explain some of these questions as

²¹This argument would be stronger if it were not based on a preposition. Presumably, fire came from "the presence of the Lord" could have come from heaven as well, although it does seem Nadab and Abihu were inside the Holy Place, which was covered overhead. At any rate, an analysis of the Korah passage makes it clear that Korah and his followers were *not* standing in the Holy Place.

²²The majority of occurrences in the Old Testament where incense is offered (in non-idolatrous contexts) take place at the altar of incense. See for example Lev. 16:12; Ex. 30:1,8,9; Deut. 33:10; I Kings 9:25; II Chron. 26:18,19;

²³Note Ex. 30:6; 40:5-6, 26 for the position of the altar of incense in relation to the ark of the covenant.

²⁴If, as some scholars have argued, the Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle were two different structures, Korah and his followers may have been even more removed from the altar of incense and hence the ark.

embellishments of the pious but scientifically ignorant scribes who penned the account centuries after it occurred, but in so doing he would be retreating to familiar territory for his argumentation - silence.

MOSES: PROPHET OF THE MOST HIGH OR HIGH PRIEST OF EGYPT?

Having asserted that the ark of the covenant was actually a weapon devised through human cunning and technology, Hancock asks himself the two questions that his view requires: What type of technology was behind the ark's power?; and How did Moses come to possess this technology? According to Hancock the answers are found in the biblical record of the life of Moses. Consider his remarks below:

It is probably the case that every Christian, Muslim, and Jew alive in the world today has a shadowy image of the prophet Moses tucked away in some corner of his or her mind. Certainly I was no exception to this rule when I began to think seriously about him and his role in the mystery of the ark. My problem was that I needed to flesh out the caricature that I had acquired in Sunday school and, in the process, to gain some real insight into the man . . . Moses was brought up in the royal household [of Egypt] where, according to the Bible, he was instructed "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" . . . Philo, the respected Jewish philosopher who lived around the time of Christ, gave a fairly detailed account of exactly *what* Moses was taught: 'Arithmetic, geometry, the lore of metre, rhythm and harmony . . . Assyrian letters and the Chaldean science of heavenly bodies.' This he also acquired from the Egyptians, who gave special attention to astrology.'

. . . I [also] learned that in his youth he (Moses) would have been given a thorough initiation into all the most arcane priestly secrets and into the mysteries of Egyptian magic - a course of study that would have included not only star-knowledge, as indicated by Philo, but also necromancy, divining, and other aspects of occult lore.²⁵

Hancock reasons from Philo's words that Moses was most likely a *Kher Heb* (Egyptian high priest), and backs his conclusion with the statement by Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge that

Moses was a skilled performer of magical rituals and was deeply learned in the knowledge of the accompanying spells, incantations, and magical formulas of every description . . . [Moreover] the miracles which he wrought . . . suggest that he was not only a priest, but a magician of the highest order and perhaps even a *Kher Heb*.²⁶

Naturally, Hancock finds in this assertion a convenient explanation for the miracles wrought by God at the hand of Moses. The plagues against Egypt, the extraction of water from the rock, and the supply of manna and the quails were all samples of Moses' expertise as an Egyptian sorcerer.²⁷ Even the parting of the *yam suph* is relegated by Hancock to knowledge held by the *Kher Heb*.²⁸

Trickery was only one application of Egyptian wisdom utilized by the clever magician. The "occult lore" which Moses would have mastered is understood by Hancock as containing a body of highly secretive "sacred science" held by the Egyptian priesthood and their own selected initiates.²⁹ He then proceeds to raise the following questions for the reader:

²⁵Ibid., pp. 295, 296, 297. In these pages (and elsewhere) Hancock draws upon the several Egyptological works: *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, by E.A. Wallis Budge, Oxford, 1934; *Egyptian Magic*, by E.A. Wallis Budge, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, London, 1901; and *Egyptian Magic*, by C. Jacq, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Chicago, 1985. Hancock's footnotes of these works are on pages 557-558 of his book.

²⁶Ibid., p. 303.

²⁷Ibid., p. 342.

²⁸Ibid., p. 302.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 303-304.

... as a magician skilled in Egyptian 'sacred science,' might not Moses have had at his disposal far more in the way of knowledge and technology than had hitherto been recognized by the archaeologists? And might he not have applied this knowledge and technology to the construction of the Ark of the Covenant?³⁰

As one might guess, Hancock answers his own questions affirmatively and then proceeds to link Moses to a long line "possessors" of secret knowledge (including Atlanteans, Freemasons, the Knights Templar, and Jesus himself), knowledge that enabled them to become masterbuilders (e.g., the pyramids), heal the sick, control nature, advance scientific inquiry and, on occasion, attain political prominence through duping the uninitiated laity into believing they had divine authority.³¹ Hancock thus answers to his satisfaction the question of who was responsible for the incredible powers of this "monstrous instrument."³²

To this point Hancock has offered only one line of evidence, the vague reference to Moses' training (Acts 7:10). While it is likely (and probably true) that Moses did receive training in such esoteric disciplines, the rest of Hancock's reconstruction does not follow. Asserting that Moses had access to some secret body of knowledge that even today escapes the detection of the world's most prominent Egyptologists is an argument from silence of extraordinary proportions. Moreover, no archaeological or textual evidence has arisen from the land of Egypt that would cause Egyptologists to abandon their hypotheses on how the pyramids were built or, in the case of some Old Testament scholars (evangelical and otherwise), to forsake naturalistic explanations for certain dramatic Old Testament events in favor of some alchemical body of ancient knowledge that could be manipulated at will.³³

Fortunately, Hancock realizes his argument is from silence and hence refers his readers to the biblical text to prove his conclusions. As we have seen, Hancock's handling of the biblical material leaves a lot to be desired, and his use of the data here does not improve. In fact, it is through examining where Hancock's assertions must inevitably lead that the weakness of his position is truly discerned.

For example, if Moses did indeed construct the weapon referred to as the ark, why and when would he have done so? Hancock believes that Moses saw himself as a paternalistic "civilizer" of the Israelites, someone who, being more enlightened than the rest of his countrymen, was in the position to bring Israel out of social and intellectual darkness. Paternalism aside, Moses was a shrewd enough leader to know that he'd need something to keep the people in line were they so insolent as to question his leadership, or were Israel to encounter external difficulties on their way to the "promised land."

According to Hancock, Moses conceived of the ark for just this purpose. Due to the effect that the ark had on certain individuals, namely Miriam's skin disorder, the skin affliction suffered by the Philistines (sores), and that after Moses descended from Mount Sinai his skin shone, Hancock speculates that Moses fortuitously discovered radioactive material (perhaps a crashed meteorite) during his time in the wilderness of Sinai. This discovery, of course, is the historical truth behind the "burning bush" incident. Due to his advanced knowledge of technology, attained through his Egyptian mentors, Moses immediately realized the weaponry potential of his discovery, and decided to return to Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to release his countrymen so he could found his own Israelite state that would rival Egypt. Through his knowledge of sorcery, Moses was able to intimidate Pharaoh into relenting, and subsequently guided his people out of Egypt to (eventually) the foot of the same mountain. Once there, he had Bezalel construct a chest to contain two pieces of the meteor (which he had duped the Israelites

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., pp. 313-338.

³²Ibid., p. 339. This is Hancock's own term.

³³In reference to the former, the chronological development of the pyramid complexes show a very natural development in technology (cf. architectural differences between the Djoser pyramid and that of Cheops) that begs the question of the existence of some body of knowledge passed on to the Egyptians by Atlanteans or otherwise. Were this knowledge present, why wouldn't its efficacy be immediately evident in early attempts at pyramids? The fact is that there exist several plausible explanations for how the Egyptians and other ancient peoples *applied* their knowledge of mathematics, physics, and astronomy (which we currently possess today) to build the pyramids. An example of the latter would be the idea that an earthquake occurred simultaneously with the blowing of the trumpets at the fall of the walls of Jericho.

into believing were tablets of stone written by Yahweh containing His laws) so as to control the radioactive energy now at his disposal. Again, due to the precision of his Egyptian training, Moses figured out a way to command this energy force at will.³⁴

Not surprisingly, Hancock's reconstruction of this series of events abounds with logical problems and deliberate manipulation of the biblical text. First, one might wonder how the ancient Egyptians could have known how to handle radioactive energy, particularly since our own knowledge of this energy force is so recent. Moreover, if Moses learned from his instructors how to harness this power, why is there no hint from Egyptian scientific data to suggest that sorcerers and priests had such knowledge? There is no archaeological evidence, of course, that the Egyptians ever dealt with anything like this. We could assume, naturally, that Moses' discovery was unique - that the reason there is no hint in the material culture and record of Egypt for harnessing this kind of power is because Moses alone stumbled onto it. This seems to be the conclusion Hancock comes to, especially considering the uniqueness of a weapon like the ark. Unfortunately, therein lies the logical difficulty with his position: Moses' training would not have covered how to tap into radioactive energy, so where did Moses learn the techniques he used for transforming two pieces of a meteorite into a controllable weapon - a weapon that could be wielded with enough precision to selectively kill individuals among a group, or merely produce injury? If the Egyptians did not possess this knowledge, Moses would have had no frame of reference for managing this kind of destructive power.

Second, the biblical record renders Hancock's explanation of Moses' position as an Egyptian magician implausible. For example, why confront Pharaoh with a few sorcerer's tricks to persuade him to let the Israelites go when Moses' could just as well have used the power he'd discovered on Mount Sinai to overpower Pharaoh and his court and set himself up as the heir to the throne? According to Hancock, the reason Moses' did not do this was that it was only after returning to Sinai that Moses instructed Bezaleel to build the ark ostensibly to hold the Law of Yahweh. What we are asked to believe, then, is that this grand possessor of fearful technological knowledge was incapable of building a wooden box in which to place his meteorite for his return trip to Egypt.

Even more nonsensical is Hancock's version of Moses' performance before Pharaoh. The familiar biblical account makes it conspicuously clear that the magicians of Egypt were capable of imitating the transformation of Moses' rod into a serpent as well as the first two plagues (water into blood and frogs upon the land).³⁵ Beyond this point, however, the magicians of Egypt were powerless, and so exclaimed to Pharaoh, "this is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:16-19).

The assertion that this is actually the record of a triumph of one *Kher Heb* over others cannot be logically defended. How can Hancock on one hand claim that Moses had access to "all the most arcane priestly secrets" and yet leave the magicians who would have received the same training as Moses - or who had possibly been Moses' own instructors - without this knowledge? As illogical as it sounds, Hancock would have us believe that Moses, at some time in his training, had access to secret occult knowledge that every other *Kher Heb* in Egypt had yet to discover. Put another way, how could Moses' knowledge of Egyptian magic be so much more intimate than that of his own teachers and fellow high priests? Additionally, is it reasonable to believe that a man with the intelligence of Moses would try to persuade Pharaoh and his magicians with tricks that, due to their common training in sorcery, would certainly not have compelled them to comply with his request?³⁶ Indeed, contending that the familiar biblical account of this confrontation is nothing more than a gloss over of dueling sorcerers seems completely pointless. The more reasonable conclusion is that at which the Egyptian priests themselves arrived - these feats went beyond magic.

HANCOCK ON THE ARK'S SPIRITUAL ANCESTRY: "GOD IN A BOX"

³⁴Hancock, pp. 340-353.

³⁵see Ex. 7:20-22; 8:1-7

³⁶Hancock, p. 558, footnote 113. Here Hancock quotes one of his sources as asserting that all Pharaohs would have been tutored in magic as part of their kingly training.

We now come to one of Hancock's most important lines of argumentation for articulating his ultimate conclusion regarding the whereabouts of the lost ark of the covenant: that it is now contained in the Church of Saint Mary of Zion in Axum, Ethiopia.³⁷ As stated before, the purpose of this paper is not to comment on Hancock's proposed solution to the disappearance of the ark.³⁸ Nevertheless, Hancock's opinions on the religious heritage of the ark require a response.³⁹

Briefly stated, Hancock believes that **both** the physical design and religious meaning of the ark derive from the ancient egyptian festival of Apet.⁴⁰ As we shall see, this belief is crucial to his contention that the *Israelites* believed that the ark *contained* their god. And, as we have already labored to illustrate, this assertion is in turn fundamental to Hancock's thesis that the *ark itself* held devastating power and was in reality a man-made weapon of destruction. Again, the question of how the "egyptianization" of the ark is relevant to Hancock's ultimate solution to the ark mystery is secondary, but even this will become clear as we examine his Apet hypothesis.

Hancock's "discovery" of the egyptian identity of Moses understandably prodded his investigation toward a distinctively egyptian explanation for the ark of the covenant. His first step toward this explanation, he reports, came after paying a visit to the Cairo Museum. While viewing the museum's exhibit of objects recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamen, Hancock came across the display of "dozens of ark-like chests or boxes, some with carrying poles, some without, but all of them conceptually similar to the Ark of the Covenant."⁴¹ The most fascinating of these objects were "the four shrines that had been built to contain the sarcophagus of Tutankhamen."⁴² Upon closer inspection, Hancock detected that "each casket was made of wood, and . . . plated *inside and out with pure gold*."⁴³ Quite naturally, Hancock could not help seeing a similarity between these objects and the construction of the ark of the covenant, and goes on to relate other similarities.⁴⁴

Hancock did not discover what for him would be the definitive piece of evidence for the ark's Egyptian background until he visited the great temple of Luxor. It was here that he stumbled across the inscribed record of the festival of Apet, a record which Tutankhamen himself had ordered carved into history.⁴⁵ Hancock describes what he saw:

Studying first the western wall of the colonnade on which the Tutankhamen reliefs were displayed, my eye was caught by what appeared to be an Ark, lifted shoulder high on its carrying poles by a group of priests. Stepping closer I quickly confirmed that this was indeed the case: with the sole proviso that the object being transported took the form of a miniature boat rather than a casket, the scene before me looked like quite a faithful illustration of the passage in the first book of Chronicles which states that the Levitical priests of ancient Israel 'carried the Ark of God with the shafts on their shoulders as Moses had ordered'.

³⁷Ibid., p. 508.

³⁸The theory that the ark is now in Ethiopia is, of course, not new and hence not original to Hancock.

³⁹It should be pointed out that the Ethiopian theory does not depend on Hancock's imaginative explanation for the ark's religious ancestry. Notwithstanding, Hancock feels his views on this subject bolster his conclusion.

⁴⁰Hancock, pp. 287-294. While Hancock refers to the name of the festival as "Apet", many professional Egyptologists spell the name Opet or 'Ipet. Since Hancock uses Apet, I have maintained this spelling throughout my discussion of his hypothesis.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 288.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid. The emphasis here is Hancock's, as he is drawing the readers attention to a feature identical to the ark's construction.

⁴⁴For example, some of the shrines had winged goddesses on them fashioned in "beaten gold", a feature which reminded Hancock of the cherubim on the lid of the ark (see pp. 288-289); see the ensuing discussion.

⁴⁵Hancock, p. 289.

Standing back to get perspective I established that the entire western wall of the colonnade was covered with images very similar to the one that had initially attracted my attention. In what seemed to be a massive and joyous procession I was able to make out the shapes of several Ark-like boats being carried on the shoulders of several different groups of priests, before whom musicians played on sistra and a variety of other instruments, acrobats performed, and people danced and sang, clapping their hands in excitement.⁴⁶

Hancock's discovery prompted him to investigate the nature of the Apet festival. He first consulted Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen who assured him that

'At the very least [the Tutankhamen shrines] prove that wooden boxes lined with gold were standard artefacts of the religious furniture of the period and that Moses would therefore have had the technology and skills at his disposal to manufacture the ark. The methods of construction that he would have employed, and the use of such prefabricated structures for religious purposes, are abundantly attested by actual remains, pictures and texts in Egypt over a long period of time.'⁴⁷

Having received scholarly "corroboration" of his suspicion Hancock researched the matter even more enthusiastically. A summary of his research follows below:

'[I discovered that] the [egyptian] gods were carried in procession in 'ships', which, as we learn from the [egyptian] sculptures, resemble in form the Hebrew Ark, and were borne on men's shoulders by means of staves . . .'

[These] ship-like arks carried during the Apet ceremonies had indeed contained gods, or rather small statues of various deities in the Egyptian pantheon. These statues had been made of stone and thus, it seemed to me, were not far removed in concept from the stone 'Tablets of the Testimony' that had supposedly been lodged inside the Ark of the Covenant and that the Israelites regarded as *embodying their God* . . .⁴⁸

Elsewhere Hancock quotes Shalom Paul and William Dever, and then Julian Morgenstern as stating, respectively:

'Some scholars have compared the Ark to the chests (*the lower part of which was generally boat-shaped*) which were brought out of the temple by the Egyptian priests at festivals, and on which statues of the gods were placed . . .'

'The original contents of the Ark must have been a sacred stone . . . [which] was either conceived of as the deity himself, or as the object in which the deity was thought to reside permanently.'⁴⁹

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 290.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 292. The above quotation is taken from Hancock's interview with Kitchen. Several comments need to be made at this point of our discussion. First, although Dr. Kitchen responded affirmatively to Hancock's question concerning the Tutankhamen material, his response should not be construed as an approval of Hancock's positions. Second, Dr. Kitchen is here assuming the so-called "late" date for the exodus (i.e., that the exodus occurred around the year 1250 B.C.). Kitchen is among a minority of evangelicals who hold to this date, and his defense of the position is well known. Third, the debate over the chronology of the period is quite irrelevant to the discussion at hand, since, as Kitchen himself admits in the above quotation, Egyptian furnishings similar to the ark have been recovered from Egypt that far antedate Tutankhamen's reign. Lastly, it could also be pointed out that the scholarly champions of the view that the ark derived from Egyptian religion, the late professors H. Gressmann (*Die Lade Jahves und das Allerheiligste des salomonischen Tempels*, 1920) and R. Hartmann ("*Zelt und Lade*", *ZAW*, 37 (1917-18), 209-244) both published their conclusions several years *before* Tutankhamen's tomb was discovered, making any chronological defense of the position (or using the position to defend the late date) immaterial.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 293 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 557 (footnote 98) and p. 293 respectively. The former quotation is from Shalom M. Paul and William G. Dever (eds.), *Biblical Archaeology*, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1973, part III, p. 252; the latter comes from Julian Morgenstern, "The

Hancock's chain of reasoning should be evident by now. Since Moses was an Egyptian high priest who lived just after Tutankhamen's reign, he would undoubtedly have been familiar with the festival of Apet.⁵⁰ Accordingly, Moses recalled the "ark-like" boat containers he had seen at Apet festivals and thought something like this would serve as an ideal receptacle for carrying his meteorite stones. Assured of the superstitious tendencies of his people, Moses realized he could convince them (through his magic and technological training) that their god Yahweh had chosen to dwell inside this container. Moses thus created his own Apet-like religion (i.e., ark worship) to help hold the Israelite masses under his control. Best of all, should the Israelites' "faith" wane and his leadership be challenged, he could always turn the ark upon the malcontents.

Before analyzing the above assertions, let us turn our attention to one final argument Hancock offers in defense of his theory, an argument Hancock relies on heavily to create a connection between Egypt, the ark, and, finally, Ethiopia.

During the course of his research into the Apet festival, Hancock discerned that the festival

. . . had taken place in the Upper Egyptian town known as 'Luxor' . . . [an area formerly] known as *Thebai* . . . Modern Europeans had subsequently corrupted this name to the more familiar 'Thebes'. In the process, however, they had obscured an intriguing etymology: the word *Thebai* had in fact been derived from *Tapet*, the name by which the Luxor/Karnak religious complex had been known in the era of Tutankhamen and Moses. And *Tapet* in its turn was merely the feminine form of *Apet* - in other words, Luxor and Karnak had originally been named after the great festival that had centred upon a procession in which arks had been carried between the two temples.⁵¹

Hancock then continues on to explain what he feels is his clinching argument. In the introduction to his book Hancock had informed his readers that while working as a journalist for the *Economist* he had become interested in the question of what had happened to the ark of the Covenant. What piqued his curiosity was the persistent belief among Ethiopians that they had in their possession the genuine ark of the covenant. He subsequently learned that the legend of the ark's arrival in Ethiopia was chronicled in an Ethiopian holy book called the *Kebra Nagast*, a source that referred to the ark as "the belly of a ship."⁵² Upon cursory investigation into the rumor, Hancock was intrigued to discover that each Abyssinian church in Ethiopia supposedly held a replica of the ark. After requesting to see one of these "replicas" he had been shown only a flat stone slab called a *tabot* (plural = *tabotat*). Unable to discern any visual connection between the stone slab and the ark of the covenant, Hancock had abandoned his investigation. He knew that if the *Kebra Nagast* referred to the ark as a *tabot*, then the word could not refer to a stone slab. But, he asked himself, what could the word mean, and why did the Ethiopians use it so elastically? The answer came later when he came across the work of Edward Ullendorf, an Ethiopic (and Hebrew) scholar who explained:

The genuine Ark is supposed to rest at Axum; all other churches can only possess replicas. In most cases they are not, however, replicas of the whole Ark, but merely of its supposed contents,

Book of the Covenant," in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. V, 1928, reprinted by KTAV Publishing House, New York, 1968, p. 121.

⁵⁰Because I have contended that the chronological debate surrounding the exodus is irrelevant to this discussion, I have reserved comment on the opinion of some that since (according to the late date view) Moses would have lived shortly after Tutankhamen, he would also have lived shortly after Akhenaten. Hancock, to his credit, ignores the presumed connection between the "monotheism" of Akhenaten and that of Moses. It is beyond the scope of this paper to cite the debate of this idea among modern Egyptologists who dispute the character of Akhenaten's religion. To Hancock's discredit, however, he opts for a Moses (was he an ancient atheist?) who manipulates the superstitious laity into thinking there is such a thing as divine power via his radioactive death machine.

⁵¹Hancock, p. 293 (emphasis his).

⁵²Ibid.; see chapter 6.

i.e., the tablets of the Law . . . In other words: the description of these stones or wooden tablets as *tabotat* is simply by way of a *pars pro toto* referring to the most important part of the Ark, the tablets of the covenant.⁵³

Fortunately for Hancock, Ullendorf also went on to state that the word *tabot* was derived "from the Jewish Palestinian Aramaic *tebuta* (*tebota*) which in turn is a derivation from the Hebrew *tebah*."⁵⁴ Hancock dutifully looked up all the occurrences of the Hebrew word *tebah*, and to his joy discovered that the word was used only of Noah's ark and the ark of bulrushes that held Moses. This discovery compelled Hancock to resume his inquiry, and once he had discovered the "real" Moses, he had journeyed to Egypt.

The inscribed testimony to the Apet procession at Luxor gave Hancock both historical and etymological links between Egypt, the ark, and Ethiopia. It was a simple matter for Hancock to connect his etymological findings with what had transpired at Thebes (*Tapet*) centuries before. Note Hancock's words:

[I knew that] the slabs of the *tabotat* carried . . . [by] Ethiopian priests were rather different in appearance from the Ark-like boats carried on the shoulders of their long-dead Egyptian counterparts. From my earlier research, however, . . . I could hardly forget that according to established etymologies the original meaning of *tabot* had been "ship-like container". Indeed, as I knew very well, the archaic Hebrew word *tebah* (from which the Ethiopian term had been derived) had been used in the Bible to refer specifically to ship-like arks, namely the ark of Noah and the ark of bulrushes in which the infant Moses had been cast adrift on the Nile. Nor, I now realized, could it possibly be irrelevant that the Kebra Nagast had at one point described the Ark of the Covenant as "the belly of a ship" containing "the Two tables which were written by the finger of God" . . .

What intrigued me about this, of course, was the phonetic similarity of the words *Tapet* and *Tabot*, a similarity that looked all the less coincidental after I had discovered from one learned source that the shape of the *Tapet* arks had evolved over the passing centuries, gradually ceasing to resemble ships so closely and becoming instead 'more and more like a chest' . . .

I began to wonder whether it was entirely possible that the [Hebrew] word *tebah* had itself been derived from the ancient Egyptian *Tapet* - and whether this derivation might not have come about because the ceremonies devised for the Ark of the Covenant had been modeled upon those of the Apet festival.⁵⁵

In Hancock's mind, this etymological connection permitted him to assert that both the physical design and religious meaning of the ark derive from the ancient Egyptian festival of Apet. The Ark of the Covenant, then, according to Hancock, is thoroughly Egyptian - from its maker, Moses the *Kher Heb*, to its religious significance, a "container for Yahweh."

At this point, Hancock's research dovetailed in his mind. He now knew from whence the ark of the covenant had conceptually come. This discovery in turn assisted him in polishing his thesis that the Israelites had believed that the ark itself had powers - powers that they mistakenly attributed to the god dwelling within it, but which Hancock knew to be resident in a very earthly source. The only reason we would conclude otherwise, opines Hancock, is because of what a few scientifically unenlightened scribes forged as the words of Moses centuries ago.

The practical ramifications of all this are noteworthy. First, it means that, just as the gods of Egyptian religion were inventions of the superstitious Egyptian psyche, so it was with the Hebrews and their God. Second, it is reasonable to conclude that either Moses was an atheist who knew all along that the power he wielded was not divine, but the result of a good education on sorcery and "sacred science,"

⁵³Ibid., p. 130 (quoting Ullendorf, "Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite) Christianity," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol.1, no. 3, 1956, p. 233, footnote 6). See also Edward Ullendorf, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, The Schweich Lectures, 1967, published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 82-84.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 556, footnote 92. Quoted from Ullendorf's article in *JSS* 1:3, p.223, footnote 6.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 291, 294 (emphasis his). The "belly of a ship" quotation from the Kebra Nagast here is elsewhere identified as the word *tabot* (see Hancock, p. 130). The "learned source" Hancock quotes in my quotation of his work here is Lady Flavia Anderson and her book *The Ancient Secret: Fire from the Sun*, RILKO Books, London, 1987, pp. 113-114.

or that he surreptitiously accredited his abilities to the Egyptian pantheon. Third, a critical element of Jewish identity is based upon a colossal historical blunder. Fourth, the covenants that Yahweh supposedly made with Israel are entirely fictitious, for Yahweh was nothing more than a meteorite (or maybe a gaseous cloud). Fifth, the spiritual leaders of Israel who followed Moses and exhorted the Jews to believe in the God of Israel were all either duped themselves, or were at least as Machiavellian as Moses. Lastly, in view of the fallaciousness of the covenants and the character of Moses, what must we as Christians conclude about that Prophet whom Yahweh said He would raise up like unto Moses?⁵⁶

AN ANALYSIS OF HANCOCK'S ASSERTIONS

It is widely recognized among Old Testament scholars, evangelical and otherwise, that the physical pattern of the ark is distinctly Egyptian.⁵⁷ After all, does it seem unreasonable that God should command Bezalel, who had worked all of his life fashioning objects of beauty for the Egyptians, to build the ark according to specifications with which he would undoubtedly be familiar? The issue at stake here, however, is not whether the ark *looked* like a piece of Egyptian furniture, but whether this resemblance overshadows a less tangible, but profoundly more consequential congruence between Egypt and Israel. Put simply: do physical similarities between the ark and Egyptian religious furnishings attest to an Egyptian religious heritage for Israel's most important cult object?

The years spanning the 18th and 19th dynasties represent the apex of the adoration of Amen and his chief city, Thebes. Amen had become the supreme god of the Egyptian pantheon, and Thebes the capital of the New Kingdom, upon the victorious expulsion of the Hyksos by the Theban king, Ahmose, founder of the 18th dynasty.⁵⁸ Amen was primarily worshipped in the East City of Thebes at the grand temple complexes at Karnak and Luxor. It was at these locations where the festival of Apet originated and took place.⁵⁹

The festival of Apet began on the nineteenth day of the second month of the year and lasted twenty-seven days at the time of Ramesses III. Basically, the festival involved a procession from Karnak to Luxor in order for Amen to celebrate a reunion with his consort, the goddess Mut. At this one time of year the image of Amen was placed in a small wooden shrine, which was in turn placed upon the god's sacred barque or ship. This shrine, of course, was more like a chest or box, and some styles did come with carrying poles. The ship was then carried to the temple of Mut, where it was joined by the images of Mut and the offspring of Amen and Mut, Khonsu. These two deities were likewise placed in shrines and carried on sacred ships. Together the three gods journeyed to the temple at Luxor. Amen, Mut, and Khonsu stayed at Luxor for several days, but scholars are uncertain as to what happened during this time. Whenever the procession stopped, presumably to allow those who were carrying the ships rest, the gods could be asked questions in oracular fashion. The festival ended when the gods returned to their original temple enclosures.⁶⁰

Certainly the case has been made for the evident structural similarities between the shrine and the ark of the covenant. But reasoning from similarity in design to congruence in purpose and religious identity is another matter. This, of course, is Hancock's assertion. You'll recall that upon viewing the Tutankhamen exhibit in Cairo, Hancock refers to "dozens of ark-like chests or boxes, some with carrying

⁵⁶I speak, of course, of Jesus Christ (cf. Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22; 7:37). Interestingly enough, Hancock does include Jesus as one of a long line of magicians and "possessors of secret knowledge"; see Hancock, pp. 326-327).

⁵⁷See for example Kenneth Kitchen, "Some Egyptian Background to the Old Testament," *Tyndale House Bulletin*, vol. 5-6, April 1960, pp. 7-13.

⁵⁸Barbara Watterson, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt*, p. 140.

⁵⁹Jaroslav Cerny, *Egyptian Religion*, p.120.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 37-38, 120-122; see also Watterson, pp. 142-143; Herman Kees, *Ancient Egypt*, pp. 260-261; Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, pp. 88-89; Pierre Montet, *Lives of the Pharaohs*, p. 152.

poles, some without, but all of them conceptually similar to the Ark of the Covenant."⁶¹ He also mentions four "shrines that had been built to contain the sarcophagus of Tutankhmen" that were covered with beaten gold on inside and out, and several "Ark-like boats being carried on the shoulders of several different groups of priests."⁶² All of this information, of course, is designed to implant into the reader's mind a picture of Egyptians carrying something that looks remarkably like the ark of covenant as part of their pagan festival. According to Hancock, since the chest which carried the gods rested inside a boat borne by men, these chests ("arks" in his words) gradually came to look more and more like ships. These "boat-arks" were used in worship of Amen at Thebes which, as Hancock informs us, was known to the Egyptians as Tapet. Eventually the Egyptian "boat-ark" became referred to by the same name, tapet. Finally, the word tapet worked its way into the Hebrew language as *tebah* ("ark"; i.e., ship) and the Ethiopic tongue as *tabot* (referring to contents of the ark and the ark itself in their holy book, the *Kebra Nagast*).

There are numerous problems with Hancock's interpretation of Apet and his etymological-theological reconstruction of the origin of the ark. First there is the issue of Hancock's use of the visual correspondence of Egyptian cult objects and the ark. As has already been mentioned, Hancock does state that the ark resembled only the chests with their carrying poles. Nevertheless he repeatedly draws an analogy not between the ark and these portable chests, but between the ark and the Egyptian barque. The reason for this is so that he can later make the etymological connection described above. Without the desire to link the ark to the Ethiopian word *tabot*, Hancock could have concentrated on the chests themselves and their obvious physical similarity to the ark.⁶³ This etymological agenda causes Hancock to commit several other oversights in his handling of the Egyptian data on Apet. For example, Hancock draws attention to the fact that the ark of the covenant and the square, box-like shrines of Tutankhamen were mutually fashioned from "beaten gold". Apart from the "apples and oranges" illogic underlying the comparison (the shrines and the chests were not the same objects), Hancock is strangely mute to the fact that while Tutankhamen's shrines were lined with "beaten gold", many chests like the kind used during the Apet festival were often not. Indeed, the famous example from Tutankhamen's tomb often cited in Bible reference sources for its striking resemblance to the ark of the covenant was not lined with gold.⁶⁴ While this observation does not overturn Hancock's view, it does mar the analogy. These observations may seem trivial, but they reveal something about Hancock's handling of the evidence. He deliberately embellishes the only real point of contact between the ark and the sacred barque of the festival of Apet - that both were transported by carrying poles - but ignores any point at which the analogy breaks down.

A second problem surfaces when Hancock at one point in his book compares the presence of several beautiful depictions of two winged women in the beaten gold of Tutankhamen's shrines to the two golden cherubim fixed upon the lid of the ark.⁶⁵ Obviously, Hancock speculates at this point that the golden images on the pharaoh's shrines may have been the inspiration for the cherubim. Again, this may be the case *artistically*, but the issue at stake here is whether Moses' instructions to Bezale'el were a *theological* statement. There is only one instance of cherubim in the Old Testament before the fashioning of the ark (Eden; Gen. 3:24) and no physical description is given, so the winged image is most likely a borrowing, although not necessarily from Egypt.⁶⁶ Since God gave Moses this direct instruction, Moses' knowledge of what cherubim looked like was apparently presupposed. At least one Old Testament

⁶¹Hancock, p. 288.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 288, 290.

⁶³recall that some were covered with beaten gold and equipped with carrying poles.

⁶⁴Howard Carter, *The Tomb of Tut`ankhamun*, 3 vols., London, 1929; see plates in vol. 2. See also for example, "Ark of the Covenant," in the *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, part I, Interscience Press, Tyndale House, 1980, p. 110.

⁶⁵Hancock, pp. 288, 289.

⁶⁶Menahem Haran, "The Ark and the Cherubim: Their Symbolic Significance in Biblical Ritual," *Israel Exploration Journal*, (part 1), vol. 9, no. 1, 1959, pp. 35-38.

scholar with special expertise in this area contends that the best source of this knowledge would have been Mesopotamia.⁶⁷ For the sake of discussion, however, if Hancock is correct, a number of questions beg for satisfactory answers. For example, one would have to wonder why cherubim are never described as being feminine in appearance in the Old Testament.⁶⁸ We would also want to know why Moses failed to tell the people of Israel that the cherubim represented deities. In the case of Tutankhamen's shrines, the two winged women are depictions of Nephthys and Isis, both goddesses, not servants or guardians of deity, like the biblical cherubim.⁶⁹ How could Moses have botched this parallel? One could respond that Moses would not have done this because he believed there was only one God, Yahweh. This is completely out of the question considering Hancock's portrayal of Moses as an Egyptian High Priest. Since, according to Hancock, Moses would have been serving in this role during the reign of Ramesses II, he would have had to have been in agreement with Egyptian polytheism, for monotheism would not have been tolerated in this post-Amarna dynasty. Perhaps Moses kept his monotheism a secret, fled Egypt, and then upon discovering his meteorites upon Sinai decided to return to Egypt, deliver his people, and erect his own monotheistic religion focused on the ark. This too is untenable, since Moses, again according to Hancock, knew that there was no god empowering the ark, but instead a wholly natural energy source that he had harnessed. Indeed, if Moses was the person Hancock has created, it seems quite strange that Moses would consciously take a parallel so vivid as the winged personages on Tutankhamen's shrines and then fail to assign to them any religious significance. Even if one were to argue that the cherubim did carry religious significance, for the lid of the ark was the place of atonement for Israel's sins, one is summarily faced with the fact that Egyptian religion is devoid of the concept of sacrificial atonement rituals involving such chests.⁷⁰

A third dilemma arising from Hancock's hypothesis is the resoundingly silent testimony of the Old Testament itself regarding cultic borrowing from Egyptian religion. Surely some hint (however faint) in could be detected in Old Testament descriptions of Israelite religion, cult practices, and theology which in some way would disclose the truth that the ark's religious roots are to be found in the Apet festival. This expectation is justifiable, but evidence is wanting. In fact, Hancock's very reconstruction of the "historical" Moses defeats the premise under discussion. For example, if Moses really was Hancock's Egyptian *Kher Heb*, and thus had the knowledge that Yahweh was nothing more than a machine, then why were images

⁶⁷Menahem Haran, "The Ark and the Cherubim: Their Symbolic Significance in Biblical Ritual," *Israel Exploration Journal*, (part 2), vol. 9, no.2, pp. 92-94. Haran's arguments for Mesopotamian analogy derives from the fact that Akkadian has a specific parallel (*kuribu*) to the heavenly creature's name. Moses, of course, would have known Akkadian (the "international" language of correspondence in his day [cf. the Amarna letters]), and may have seen such creatures in Akkadian art. I would add that this correspondence is also preferable to an Egyptian one for the reason that the winged women on Tutankhamen's shrine are deities, whereas the cherubim of the ark are not.

⁶⁸Actually, the appearance of the cherubim are not even consistently human. See Haran, (part 1), vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 35-38.

⁶⁹Alexandre Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, Harper and Row, New York, 1955, p. 65, plate 21.

⁷⁰A consultation of several major sources on the subject of Egyptian religion reveals that Egyptologists have come to a general consensus on at least the character of Egyptian religion if not every detail of the meaning of Egyptian religious practices. For example, Egyptologists for the most part agree that the Egyptians had no concept of sin (depending, of course, on how sin is defined). In the Egyptian mind, man was not a "sinner", a being that was under the wrath of the gods, or who committed acts of direct rebellion against the gods. "Sin" if the term be allowed, was the result of ignorance, of unknowingly committing an act of non-conformity to Maat ("order"). As a result, these violations did not require the absolution, through an atonement procedure, of the gods. Rather, the ignorant party was chastised and instructed by the gods. Adherence to Maat was used as a litmus test for entrance into "heaven". The religion focused on works, therefore, not on atonement via sacrifices. Maat was a gift from the gods, "instilled in people's hearts to enable them to lead a good life" (Wente, see source below). Consequently, the sacrifices in Egypt were not for the purpose of salvation or forgiveness, but were performed primarily because they were an ontological means for mankind to identify with the "histories" and activities of the gods. In a secondary sense, the sacrifices were designed, in the opinion of some scholars, to sustain the gods. See Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Harper & Row, 1948, pp. 73-80; Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 1894 (reprinted by Dover Publications, 1971), pp. 259-305; Jack Finegan, *Myth and Mystery: An Introduction to the Pagan Religions of the Biblical World*, Baker, 1989, pp. 39-64; and Edward Wente, "Egyptian Religion," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. II, 1992, pp.408-412.

of Yahweh expressly forbidden? One would presume that there would be no taboo against visual depictions of the god if the inspiration for the Israelite cult was Egypt. It is useless to appeal to the second commandment, for as Hancock has already informed us, Moses did not actually bring any law tablets down from Sinai, but two meteorites, and the graven image command has no antecedent in Scripture.⁷¹ Hancock's argument then requires the conclusions that Moses would find abhorrent the idea of making an image of a god he knew didn't really abide in the ark, and that he would for some reason want to prohibit his fellow Israelites from fashioning any of these images. Why, if Moses knew Yahweh did not exist, did he care to announce such a prohibition? And if Hancock would credit Moses with an original idea here, it in turn seems pointless to credit Egypt with Israel's religious institutions. Moreover, one would also wonder why the Old Testament bears no indisputable record of an annual Apet-like festival as being part of the Israelite religious calendar. Many scholars contend that there was a yearly processional involving the ark connected to the Jewish New Year and the celebration of kingship.⁷² Those who espouse such an opinion typically base it upon the Old Testament's ancient near eastern context; references to a yearly feast at Shiloh, where the ark was kept at the end of the period of the Judges (Judges 21:19; 20:27), and the comparison of phraseology between II Samuel 6 and certain Psalms.⁷³ Opponents of this theory point out that references like those in Judges do not specifically say the ark was used at the annual feast, and point out the absence in the Old Testament record of the ark ever being used regularly in this way.⁷⁴ Adherents typically counter that the silence of the Old Testament in this regard is not surprising since the Israelite religious calendar was set *before* the establishment of the monarchy. If this be correct, the annual feast at Shiloh would have been used as a model for the ark/kingship feast, or was merged with the later celebration. Consequently, the use of the ark in a kingship ceremony would have only begun at around the middle of the 11th century B.C. with the coronation of Saul.⁷⁵

Hancock was apparently unaware of this issue, for he does not mention it among his arguments. If he had been, he could have made note that current scholarly opinion on the meaning of the festival of Apet does argue that the festival signified the legitimacy of the Pharaoh's election by Amen to be king;

⁷¹In his important book, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, Dr. Walter Kaiser, in an attempt to find the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament prior to Sinai, uses Genesis 31:39 (Laban's inquiry of Jacob, "Why did you steal my gods . . .") to show that the prohibition against making graven images was part of the law "written on man's heart" (see page 82). I am not convinced this is the case. The verse may merely indicate that images of any god who was not Yahweh were abominable, but simply does not tell us that an Israelite (or any righteous individual before the call of Abraham) understood that making an image of the true God would be an offense to the true God before the giving of the Ten Commandments.

⁷²This issue has been debated among Old Testament scholars for some time. Many, like C.L. Seow, contend that there was a yearly ark-processional practiced in the Old Testament connected to the Jewish New Year celebration and the celebration of kingship (see C.L. Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, p. 390; and Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, The city of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, JSOT Press / Sheffield Academic Press, 1987). Proponents of this view feel that references such as Judges 21:19 to a yearly feast at Shiloh as evidence for such a celebration. For an opposing view, see W. Lotz, M.G. Kyle, and C. Armerding, "Ark of the Covenant," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, edited by G. Bromiley, vol. 1, p. 292. Opponents of this idea stress the fact that the Old Testament calendar contains no such event, and references like Judges 21:19 do not mention the ark or the beginning of the new year. Proponents of the view counter by asserting that the Israelite calendar was set *prior* to the monarchy and would then logically omit kingship.

⁷³For example, Psalm 132; 78:61; 26:8; 24; 47:5.

⁷⁴The ark was, of course, brought to Jerusalem by David with much pomp and circumstance (II Samuel 6:12-17), and there was certainly great ceremony at its installation in the Temple under Solomon (I Kings 8). These events are exceptional, however, and in any event, are never certainly connected to any annual event.

⁷⁵The date is a rounding off of figures taken from Gleason Archer, "The Chronology of the Old testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, Zondervan, p. 368.

that is, Apet signified, by symbolic re-enactment, the Pharaoh's kingship.⁷⁶ He might then have utilized this information in his Apet theory, but unfortunately to no avail. Regardless of which view is correct, Hancock's idea that the religious inspiration for the ark was the Apet festival cannot be sustained in reference to either. What the debate over an annual kingship festival in Israel means for our discussion is this: if the presumed ark processional never existed, Hancock is left with the fact that his Egyptian inspiration for the ark failed to inspire; that is, he would have to explain why the main Israelite cult object, having been adopted from an Egyptian archetype, was never used in the same fashion as the archetype. Again, if the parallel is so self-evident, why was it not self-evident to the ancient Israelites? On the other hand, if the ark was indeed used in such a way as mentioned above, Hancock's thesis is still defective, precisely because such a processional would have originated *well after the time of Moses*.⁷⁷ Lastly, it could also be added that the only obvious reference to an Israelite adoption of Egyptian religion is negative. It seems incredible that Moses would have been building his ark religion after Egyptian precedent and then react so violently to the *golden calf* incident, particularly when the goddess Apet, who gave the city and its subsequent festival its name, was a form of the *cow-goddess* Hathor in Egyptian religion!⁷⁸

The fourth problem with Hancock's proposition is the etymological evidence he proffers in its defense. Indeed, the utter speciousness of his argumentation requires extended commentary. Recalling the formulation of his etymological argument (pages 11-12 of this paper), Hancock's first assertion is that the name *Thebes* was derived by the Greeks from the feminine form of the Egyptian word *Apet*; i.e., *Tapet*. In this regard, he is basing his conclusion on the opinion of A.E. Wallis Budge, although Hancock misapplies Budge's words due to his lack of knowledge of the Egyptian language.⁷⁹ Contrary to Hancock's statement, *Apet* does not *become* feminine with the addition of "Ta". Rather, *Apet* itself is feminine because of the *-t* suffix, the characteristic gender suffix for most feminine nouns in Middle Egyptian.⁸⁰ The "Ta" prefix, which Hancock attaches to *Apet* is actually the feminine definite article.⁸¹ The name *Apet* itself was given to the northern area in the city of *W3st*, the actual Egyptian name for the city that the Greeks called *Thebes*.⁸² *Apet* was the name of the goddess worshipped in the particular locale, and was a form of the cow-goddess Hathor.⁸³ *Apet*, then, was never the name of the city, but a locale within the city boundaries.⁸⁴ Eventually the annual feast of Apet attained political prominence, a fact probably related to the elevation of the city itself to preeminence during the New Kingdom. This turn of events led to a national association of *W3st* (to the Greeks, *Thebes*) and the festival of *Apet*.⁸⁵

⁷⁶Lanny Bell, "Luxor temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 44, no. 4, October 1985, pp. 251-294 (see summary on p. 289).

⁷⁷If one espouses the "early" date for the Exodus, the presumed processional-celebration would have begun nearly 350 years after Moses' death; the "late" date view (used by Hancock) yields a 150 year gap.

⁷⁸E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, vol. I, pp. 428-438; vol. II, p. 3.

⁷⁹Budge, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt*, vol. II, p.3. It should be pointed out that many Egyptologists do not consider this connection credible (see Watterson, p. 139).

⁸⁰Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, p. 34.

⁸¹Budge, vol. II, p.3; Gardiner, p. 87.

⁸²Watterson, p. 139; Gardiner, pp. 503, 626; Budge, vol. II, p. 3.

⁸³ Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, vol. I, pp. 428-438; vol. II, p. 3.

⁸⁴*Apet* was also the name of the second month in the Egyptian calendar, and at least one scholar speculates that the month got its name after the popular feast to the goddess Apet (Opet); see Cerny, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 120.

⁸⁵This rise to prominence is reflected in the term *Apet* itself in Egyptian literature. You'll recall that for the sake of this paper, I have adopted the spelling *Apet* (so Hancock) rather than *Ipset* or *Opet*, the spellings used more often in Egyptological works.

The salient point in all this discussion is that Hancock begins his etymological excursion with a false base-word. Not only would the Egyptians not have used the name *Apet* to speak of the city in question, but the word *Tapet* as used by Hancock is entirely fictional. For sake of etymology, Hancock needs a base-word of three radicals to mate to the Hebrew word *tebah* (consonants t-b-h) and the Ethiopian word *tabot* (consonants t-b-t). Toward this end he manipulates two words in Egyptian, *Ta* (the prefixed article) and *Apet* (a noun). This would be akin to taking the prefixed ה and adding it to the noun ע and then claiming that the result, הע, does not mean "the people/nation," but actually forms a completely different word capable of standing on its own, the article now having become the first radical in a triradical word. To illustrate further, Hancock's base-word *Tapet* has no more validity than using the English definite article "the" and coupling to it the noun "ban" and claiming that whenever the two are detected in this order and proximity they are to be read together as "Theban."⁸⁶ Hancock's etymology is consequently doomed from the beginning.

Hancock goes on, of course, to link his imaginary base word to the Hebrew word *tebah*. *Tebah* is used of only two objects in the Old Testament: Noah's "ark of gopher wood" (Gen. 6:14 and subsequent references to the "ark") and the "ark of bulrushes" in which the infant Moses was placed (Exo. 2:3 and subsequent references to this "ark"). This fact points to what I will contend below is ultimately the Achilles heel of Hancock's entire reconstruction: *tebah* is never used to refer to the ark of the covenant.⁸⁷ To my knowledge Hancock cites no scholarly source for confirming the consensus that the Hebrew *tebah* is a borrowing from Egypt. Rather, Hancock, upon reading that Ullendorf linked Ethiopic *tabot* to Hebrew *tebah*, assumed that there must be a link to Egypt upon the basis of his erroneous understanding of *Tapet*. Most Old Testament scholars, however, do agree that *tebah* does derive from an ancient Egyptian word, but that word is not *Tapet* (or *Apet*, or *Ta-Apet* for that matter).⁸⁸

Of those who see a borrowing here, opinion is divided as to which Egyptian word was loaned. Most feel that *tebah* (תבה feminine noun) comes from the Egyptian *db3t* [also spelled *tbt* or *dbt* in Egyptian]; "box", "chest", "sarcophagus", "coffin".⁸⁹ At least one scholar feels that *tebah* (especially in Genesis 6:14ff.) comes from an Egyptian word meaning "palace".⁹⁰ Interestingly, none of these words

Note that *'Ipet*, due to the celebration involving a procession from Karnak to Luxor was phonetically (1) part of the word for the temple at Karnak (*'Ipet-swt*; "Temple of Karnak"); (2) equivalent to the word for the month (*'Ipet*) in which the festival was held (although suffixed with [presumably] the cow's skin and goddess determinatives); and (3) used (with the determinative for an enclosed, domed building and the Egyptian word for "south" [rst] modifying) to denote the final destination of the *'Ipet* procession to celebrate the reunion between Amen and his consort Mut at (what came to be known as) Luxor (*'Ipet rst*; "the southern harem").

⁸⁶The illustration is not completely appropriate, for English does not have prefixed articles.

⁸⁷The word *tebah* is used of the ark in Mishnaic Hebrew (see Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17 (NICOT)*, p. 280. The reason for this, as I suggest above, is that both words simply meant "box" or "chest". There is no connotation of the *Apet* festival in the word *db3t*. As my ensuing discussion shows, the words for the sacred furniture used at *Apet* were quite different, without so much as a hint of etymological relation.

⁸⁸Ibid.; See also Speiser, *Genesis (Anchor Bible)*; and Sailhamer, *Genesis (EBC, vol. 2)*; p. 83.

⁸⁹Hamilton, p. 280; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English*, MacMillan, p.689; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebraisches und Aramaisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967, pp. 1546-1547; and A.S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its relation to Egyptian*, Oxford, p. 205. The noun *db3t* was in turn derived from the verb *db3* which meant "to clothe, adorn (the sarcophagus being an "adornment" for the body of Pharaoh[?]); see Gardiner, p. 604.

⁹⁰John Sailhamer, "Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, Zondervan, p. 83. Sailhamer does not cite any Egyptian spelling in his discussion (he cites Koehler-Baumgartner's *Lexikon in Veteris Testament Libros*, p. 1017 as his source). Hence he leaves us to assume he means that there is an Egyptian word *tebah* which means palace, but such a word is not listed in either Raymond Faulkner's *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Griffith Institute, 1962 or Gardiner's dictionary and sign list at the end of his *Egyptian Grammar* (in both of these, the word for "palace" is ih or `h).

are the ancient Egyptian terms for "palanquin" (*kni*⁹¹ or *kniw*⁹²); "portable shrine" (*kniw*⁹³); "shrine" (*k3(r)i* or *k3r*⁹⁴), or "sacred barque" itself (*wi3*⁹⁵).

The only other arguable possibility Hancock to which Hancock could have referred as the identity of the loanword behind *tebah* would be *dpt* ("ship").⁹⁶ Three considerations point to the fact that this relationship is spurious. First, the object in question which Hancock seeks to match with an Egyptian term is the ark, not the sacred bark. One must remember that the Egyptians themselves kept both objects distinct in their vocabulary. In other words, they would **not** have referred to the chest that held the figure of a god as *dpt*. Second, even if *dpt* was the source of *tebah*, Hancock's thesis that the ark is the religious progeny of the Apet festival is not strengthened. This is due to the actual occurrences of *tebah* in the Hebrew Bible. In both cases, the objects could be viewed as "ships". The fact remains, however, that *tebah* is never the word that corresponds to the Hebrew ark of the covenant. Since it is Hancock's goal to link the ark of the covenant with the sacred ships (barques) used at Apet, the only way to accomplish this would be to assert (and prove) that the word *dpt* itself has an inherently sacred connotation. It is true that this word does appear in contexts where the sacred bark is referred to (*dpt-ntr*⁹⁷), but the only reason it refers to that which is sacred or holy is because of its genitive relationship of *ntr*.⁹⁸ In other words, *dpt* does not inherently refer to Apet (or any other) sacred barques. Thus, while *dpt* could perhaps be argued as the loanword behind *tebah*, it would only be because both words are descriptive of objects that floated on water and carried people, and not due to a religious congruence. Finally, since word borrowings by their very nature are *deliberate*, we would have to conclude that *tebah/dpt* in Genesis 6:14 and Exodus 3:2 was used specifically to deify the *occupants* (Noah and Moses, respectively) of the *tebah*. If one accepts the biblical account of the nature of Hebrew religion, the result of this reconstruction is blasphemy. However, even taking a critical-evolutionary view of Israelite religion results in a dismissal of the argument. One would have to assume, as Hancock does, that the two passages cited above are at least as late as the 9th century B.C. This in turn would force us to conclude that at a time well into the Divided Monarchy the Israelites believed in the deification of men! Even the idea used by Hancock that the Israelites viewed men such as Noah and Moses as "civilizers" or heroes of (literary) epic proportion cannot sustain the imagery that using *dpt (ntr)* demands.⁹⁹

The fifth, and certainly the most flawed, element in Hancock's position on the Egyptian origin of the ark of the covenant is that *tebah* (תבה) is not once used in the text of the Hebrew Bible to refer to the ark of the covenant.¹⁰⁰ Rather, the word ארון ('aron) is the word exclusively reserved for the ark of the

⁹¹Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, p. 524.

⁹²Faulkner, *Dictionary*, p. 280.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Gardiner, p. 494.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 499.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 602.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸In Middle Egyptian grammar, genitives are formed in two ways ("direct" and "indirect"; see Gardiner, pp. 65,66). In the phrase *ntr* () "god" is the first hieroglyph while *dpt* () "ship" is the second (is an example of the direct genitive, where the genitive follows the noun that governs it. The reason that the genitive *ntr* here precedes the governing noun is the Egyptian tendency of "honorific transposition" (Gardiner, p. 51).

⁹⁹Hancock, pp. 327-337.

¹⁰⁰Results of a Hebrew word search using Bibleworks for Windows.

covenant in the Hebrew Bible. What this means, of course, is that not only is Hancock's reconstruction of the ark's religious heritage based on a series of inconsistent and even fallacious arguments, the very foundation of his thesis is specifically **denied** by the Hebrew text! Hancock did discover this dilemma during his research, and offered a curious solution:

That a different name ('Aron) is was subsequently used for the Ark of the Covenant could simply be a function of the fact that the Ark itself had *disappeared* from Jerusalem by the time that the books of the Old Testament came to be officially codified - and that the biblical scribes, setting down the oral history of the Jewish people, had been confused or uncertain about some of the key details of the religious tradition from which the lost relic had hailed (emphasis the author's).¹⁰¹

At best this is an argument from silence. Simply asserting that the scribes who actually penned the books of the Bible were unfortunately ignorant of the facts Hancock now provides in his research only sidesteps the issue. Reiterating the fact that the entire etymological reconstruction offered by Hancock lacks substance would be a sufficient response to the above quotation. Notwithstanding the inefficacy of Hancock's words, I will comment briefly in response to the statement.¹⁰²

Obviously from the above quotation Hancock is in some way relying on the oral transmission of the Hebrew text to resolve the textual dilemma. What we are asked to assent to is that the most accounts of the Hebrew ark - the oral traditions - made plentiful references to the ark by way of the word *tebah*. These accounts were transmitted orally and then finally written down. During this process, however, something happened: the *tebah* references were totally changed into references to the ark as 'aron while the accounts were evolving in oral form - and the scribes who reduced them to writing had no idea the words had been changed. Curiously, Hancock here logically refutes himself with this reasoning, for he bases his explanation of the textual dilemma upon the *unreliability* of oral tradition. If oral tradition is so unreliable, how can Hancock in good conscience argue so persistently *from the text* for his proofs as to Moses' Egyptian upbringing, his burning bush (meteorite) encounter at Sinai, the mighty deeds of the ark (which mark it as a deadly weapon of earthly origin), the textual indications of the ark's radioactivity, and, even more importantly for his *ultimate* conclusion, the verses that speak to the disappearance (but not demise) of the ark? It seems that Hancock wants to persuade us that oral tradition and the text which relies upon it are only to be considered reliable when in support of his views and not otherwise. Additionally, one would have to wonder how Hancock could presuppose the *untrustworthiness* of oral tradition supports his argument *precisely because of its amazing precision and consistency* - that every reference to the ark as *tebah* was changed!

My final criticism of Hancock's Ape thesis for the ark's ancestry concerns the way Hancock so thoroughly overlooked the vast amount of scholarly material relating the ark to its ancient Semitic environment. Giving Hancock the benefit of the doubt, we could conclude that he was ignorant of the data, much of which provides a positive refutation of his views; that is, it provides better answers to some of the questions he is asking as to the (interrelated) religious-political influences to which the ark (at least in some way) was subject.¹⁰³ To illustrate, there is ample archaeological and literary evidence to demonstrate that the ark may be viewed as a divine footstool (cf. I Chron. 28:2; Psalm 99:5) although

¹⁰¹Hancock, p. 557.

¹⁰²Obviously, if one adheres to the traditional view of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Hancock's position is highly improbable and logically self-defeating. If Hancock (and he does not) maintained Mosaic authorship and sought to defend his quotation, he would have to argue that Moses the *Kher Heb* originally used *tebah* in describing the ark of the covenant, only to have later scribes consistently change *tebah* to 'aron. Several questions and implications arise in the face of such an idea. For example, how would Hancock (or anyone) ever be able to demonstrate that this occurred without a Hebrew text from the era before the mass revisions took place that would demonstrate the argument to be valid? Hancock's only evidence would be his own statement. And given the highly developed state of the discipline of textual criticism - which has overwhelmingly lent credibility to the scribal tendency to *preserve* the received texts (even when scribes *doubted* them at points), it seems inconceivable that such a description of events would ever have transpired.

¹⁰³I am speaking in guarded terms because of the delicate balance for which one must strive when reconciling the overt uniqueness of Israelite religion and the certifiable ancient Near Eastern parallels to the ark (see discussion).

some OT scholars (notably M. Haran) believe references like the ones above speak of the Temple itself (in which rested the ark) and not the ark, as God's footstool.¹⁰⁴ There are plentiful examples in ancient near eastern art (and Haran cites this fact) in which the god is shown as resting his feet upon some type of chest or container. This parallel effectively demolishes one of Hancock's principal presuppositions, that the Israelites believed the ark *contained* their god, for the ancients (including the Egyptians) were

in the habit of burying various books, documents, written oaths, and **covenants**, in a special case under the images of gods in temples . . . In these cases the documents concerned served as a "testimony" before the gods, which both parties would take care to observe (emphasis mine).¹⁰⁵

The parallel here is striking. The Israelites did not believe Yahweh lived in the ark. Rather, the ark was the logical place to place the tablets of His covenant with them; this imagery would have been readily understood.

Haran also points out that the ark could also be presented in Scripture as God's throne (I Sam. 4:4; II Sam. 6:2; II Kings 19:15 among others).¹⁰⁶ The point here is that both depictions of the ark in the Old Testament Scriptures testify to religious/theological parallelism, since both of these ideas were quite common in the ancient near east.¹⁰⁷ Scholarly study of the word '*aron*' also serves to indicate that the most likely reason '*aron*' (as opposed to *tebah*) was used to for the ark was not due to Hancock's frail speculation, but because the word adequately described the visual appearance of the ark as a chest, not "the belly of a ship" as Hancock wishes.¹⁰⁸ Thus the appearance and several of the religious significances of the ark reflect semitic influences that do not undermine the integrity of the biblical accounts, but rather strengthen their authenticity.¹⁰⁹ These parallels are widely attested in the ancient near east, unlike the forced similitudes of Hancock, who seems to be arguing from a conclusion rather than toward one.

¹⁰⁴For a defense of the former idea, see C.L. Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. I, pp. 386-393). For the latter, see Menahem Haran, "The Ark and Cherubim: Their Symbolic Significance in Biblical Ritual," *Israel Exploration Journal* vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 30-38; and vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 89-98.

¹⁰⁵Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1978, p255 (quotation taken from J. Herrmann, "Agyptische Analogien zum Funde des Deuteronomiums," *ZAW* 28 (1908), 299-300).

¹⁰⁶Haran, *Israel Exploration Journal* (parts 1,2).

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Zobel, "'Aron," in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 363-374.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., see especially p. 369. If anything, the certain semitic parallels point to the antiquity of an historical ark.

