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This study provides a preliminary examination of the presence of Jewish communities beyond Alexandria in Hellenistic Egypt, with a particular focus on the Fayum region during the 3rd century BCE. Through the analysis of documentary sources, it investigates the extent and nature of Jewish settlement in this area and explores the role of these peripheral communities in the production of the most significant literary work of Egyptian Jewry: the Septuagint of the Pentateuch. By situating these communities within the broader socio-historical context of Ptolemaic Egypt, this study seeks to reassess their contribution to Jewish cultural and textual transmission in antiquity.

Keywords: Septuagint, Hellenistic Egypt, Hellenistic Judaism, Pentateuch, Fayum, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*

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The concept of a “communicative city” is a metaphor on that it focuses our attention on the communication patterns that connect people in cities and especially on the relationship between the urban context and communication phenomena, so that those who plan, design, develop, manage, and live in a city recognize the impact their activities have on communication and how communication affects citizens and city in turn. Such a model seems to work fairly well for some ancient Mediterranean urban systems, and this especially because some of these cities, on a typological level, emerge as from above hegemonic creations (or court cities), in which communication stands as an element directly driven by urban powers. The case of Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria, in its *longue durée* history, is quite emblematic. With this paper I aim at demonstrating how (1) Alexandria was a typical hegemonic city, i.e. a from above artificially constructed city (or a court city) in which communicative ecosystem served as a well-regulated instrument for fostering attachment around the dominant Greek hegemony; (2) how non-Greek groups of the city, in a more or less marginalized position, were involved in such a system for their communicative survival; concerning this last point, I will focus on a very curious case, that of the *De monarchia*, i.e. an anthology of supposed quotations from

ancient Greek authors transmitted among Justin Martyr's works. This *anthologie du plagiat* is probably a communicative testimony of the Hellenistic Jewish/Judaic Alexandrian system – in response and/or in relation to the hegemonic media system of the city – and it was only later attributed to Justin Martyr, especially when the apologist was assumed as one of the inventors of orthodox Christianity.

Keywords: Alexandria of Egypt, Communicative City, Urban Media Systems, Judaism(s) in Hellenistic-Roman Alexandria, Pseudo-Justin's *De monarchia*, Urban Religion

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The study of some inedited fragments from a late antique codex in the PSI collection led to the discovery of small portions of the *Protevangelium Iacobi* joining to the PSI I 6 (published by Ermenegildo Pistelli in 1912) and two fragments from the *De Pascha* by Melito, an almost complete work transmitted by papyrological sources. The identification lies on the ground of few letters, but it seems to be enough sound. All these fragments are from the same artifact, a miscellaneous codex produced in Hermopolis in the 4-5th century which shares common features with similar books of the 4th century, as P. Beatty 12 and P. Bodmer C.

Keywords: Melito of Sardis, *Protevangelium Iacobi*, Greek Papyri, Hermopolis, Miscellaneous Codices, Apocryphal Christian literature

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This paper aims at discussing the reception of John 4:19-26 in Patristic exegesis, especially in those texts which link the Gospel passage with issues as the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, the role played by the sacred spaces in Christian thought and practice, the mounting relevance of “seeing” and visual experiences for the believers. The survey demonstrates that the ambiguity towards the Temple and – generally – the holy places is a consistent feature which has its roots in the New Testament itself, and proceeds continuously before, during and after Constantine’s accession.

Keywords: John 4:19-26, Patristic exegesis, Temple, Spiritual vs material worship

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The Ark of the Covenant occupies a prominent place in both the Old and New Testaments, yet Scripture itself does not present an explicit typological connection between the Ark and Mary. This association arose only through later theological reflection within the Church’s tradition. It was the Church Fathers who first began interpreting the Ark as a *typos Mariae*, although this typology remained relatively understated in early Christian thought. A more developed interpretation only emerged in the late Middle Ages. Notably, the *Speculum humanae salvationis* exemplifies this development by identifying the Ark with Mary and allegorically linking its contents – the stone tablets of the Law, the manna, and Aaron’s staff – to key aspects of Mary’s identity and her role in salvation history. The motif of the Ark continues to hold theological relevance in contemporary Catholic thought, underscoring its enduring symbolic power in the Church’s presentations of Mary.

Keywords: Ark of the Covenant, Mary, Typological reading, Church Fathers, *Speculum humanae salvationis*

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Keywords: Religious Women, Infant Jesus, Texts, Images, Devotional Objects, Holy Dolls

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Hans Ausloos

The Old Testament Ark of the Covenant as Prefiguration of Mary

From the earliest period of Christianity – particularly within the tradition of so-called typological exegesis – certain Old Testament texts and motifs were regarded as prefiguration (*typos*) of Mary, who is then understood as their *antitypos*.¹

Against the backdrop of the widespread allegorical interpretation of Scripture, it was especially the Church Fathers who gave significant impetus to this typological reading of the Old Testament. Within this interpretative framework, the motif of the Ark of the Covenant – an element of considerable significance in the Old Testament's portrayal of ancient Israel's history – came to be seen as a typological foreshadowing of Mary.

Before turning, in the second part of this contribution, to an examination of the interpretation of Mary as *antitypos* of the Ark of the Covenant, it is first necessary to briefly consider how the Ark is presented within biblical literature, both the Old and New Testaments.² Without

¹ The typological interpretation of the Old Testament – whereby Old Testament figures, motifs, and events are understood as prefiguration of corresponding realities in the New Testament and Christian theology –, has its roots in the New Testament itself. For instance, in Rom 5:14 Adam is referred to as a τύπος (“typos”) of the one who was to come. Similarly, 1 Pet 3:21 identifies baptism as the ἀντίτυπος (“antitypos”) of the events narrated in the story of Noah's ark and the flood, in which only a few were saved from the water (see J.E. Alsup, “Typology”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 voll., vol. VI, New York, Doubleday, 1992, 682-5). In this context, Augustin's well-known dictum is often cited: *Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet* (*Quaestiones in Heptateuchum, libri septem* 2,73). The author is *Directeur de recherches* at the Belgian *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique* (F.R.S.-FNRS) and professor of Old Testament exegesis at the *Université catholique de Louvain* (Belgium). He is also Research Associate at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein, South Africa).

² See, in this regard, M. O'Carroll, *Theotokos. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock, 1982, 49-51, and J. Crehan, “The Ark of the Covenant”, *Clergy Review* 35 (1951), 301-11. Closely related to the imagery of the Ark of the Covenant is

such a survey of the biblical depiction of the Ark of the Covenant, it is difficult to properly grasp its later typological appropriations.

I. THE ARK OF THE COVENANT IN THE BIBLE

To prevent potential confusion, it is important to note that the Ark of the Covenant has no connection to Noah's ark, as recounted in Gen 6-9. Although many modern Bible translations – such as those in English – use the same word for both the Ark of the Covenant and Noah's ark (e.g. *arche* in French, *arca* in Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish, *Arche* in German, and *ark* in Dutch), the Hebrew Bible clearly distinguishes between the two by employing entirely different terms. For Noah's ark, the Hebrew term *tēbā* is used, whereas the Ark of the Covenant is consistently referred to with the word *'ārōn*.

This conflation in modern Bible translations can likely be traced back to the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Pentateuch in the 3rd century BCE. The LXX renders both *tēbā* – Noah's ark – and *'ārōn* – the Ark of the Covenant – with the same Greek word, *κιβωτός* (“ark”). This precedent was followed by the Latin Vulgate (4th century CE), which likewise translated both Hebrew terms as *arca*. This lexical overlap in the Greek and Latin versions has influenced subsequent translations and contributed to the ambiguity.³

I. The Ark in the Old Testament

The Ark of the Covenant plays a significant role particularly in the Pentateuch and the so-called Historical Books (Joshua; 1–2 Samuel; 1–2 Kings). It is first mentioned in Exod 25:10.⁴ However, this does not

the depiction of Mary as the Temple of the Lord. On this theme, see especially the recent study by J.-M. Salvador-González, “Latin Theological Interpretations on *Templum Dei* until the Second Council of Constantinople: A Mariological and Christological Symbol”, *Veritas. Revista de filosofía y teología* 49 (2021), 115-33. With regard to Noah's ark as a *typos* of Mary, see L. Avellis, “Note sull'iconografia di Noè nell'arca (III-VI sec.)”, *Vetera Christianorum* 45 (2008), 19-45.

³ In Exod 2:3, the Hebrew term *tēbā* refers to the “basket” in which the newborn Moses is placed. In this verse, the LXX renders *tēbā* as *θῖβις* (“basket”), while the Vulgate uses the Latin noun *fiscella*. According to M. Harl, “Le nom de l'Arche de Noé dans la Septante: les choix lexicaux des traducteurs alexandrins, indices d'interprétations théologiques?”, in Ead., *La langue de Japhet. Quinze études sur la Septante et le grec des chrétiens*, Paris, Cerf, 1992, 97-125, esp. 106-8, the LXX translator's lexical choice reveals an intention to draw a conceptual parallel between Noah's ark and the Ark of the Covenant.

⁴ Gen 50:26 also uses the term *'ārōn*. In this verse, it refers to Joseph's coffin. The LXX translates the term as *σώφς* (“coffin”), while the Vulgate renders it as *loculus*. Throughout the Old Testament, the Ark is referred to using various designations. The most common include: “ark of the covenant” (*hā'ārōn habbārīt* – Josh 3:14), “ark” (*hā'ārōn* – Josh 6:4), “ark of the testimony” (*'ārōn hā'ēdūt* – Exod 25:22), “ark of the covenant of YHWH” (*'ārōn bārīt-yhwh* – Num 10:33), “ark of YHWH” (*'ārōn yhwh* – Josh 3:13), “ark of YHWH your God” (*'ārōn*

imply that the most ancient textual traditions concerning the Ark are found in the book of Exodus.⁵ In Exod 25:10-21, where God commands the Israelites to construct the Ark, and in Exod 37:1-9, where this command is carried out, the Ark is mentioned in the broader context of the construction of the portable sanctuary that accompanies the Israelites during their wilderness journey.⁶ According to Exod 26:33, the Ark is to be placed in the innermost sanctuary – the Holy of Holies (*qōdeš haqqōdāšim*) – a command which is executed in Exod 40:21.

Exod 25:10-16 specifies the dimensions of the Ark: two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide and high.⁷ It was to be made of “shittim wood” (*ʿāšē šittîm*). The Hebrew term *šittîm*, though difficult to define precisely, is commonly translated as “acacia (wood)” (as, e.g. in the NRSV, although the KJV transliterates the term as “shittim wood”). The LXX uses ξύλον ἀσήπτον as its translation equivalent, which can be translated as “decay-resistant wood”.⁸ The Ark was to be overlaid with pure gold inside and out (Exod 25:13), and a gold molding was to be made around it. Four golden rings were to be cast and fastened to its feet, through which two poles, also made of “shittim wood” and overlaid with gold, were to be inserted and remain permanently in place to allow the Ark to be carried. According to Exod 25:17-21, a cover of pure gold featuring two winged cherubim was to be placed atop the Ark. The NRSV refers to this cover as the “mercy seat”.

Deut 10:1-5 offers a somewhat different, and notably simpler, presentation of the ark. In this pericope, God instructs Moses to construct a wooden ark (from “shittim wood”), but no dimensions are given, and there is no mention of gold overlay.

yhwh ʿēlōhēm – Josh 4:5), “ark of God” (*ʿārôn ʿēlōhîm* – 1 Sam 3:3), “ark of the covenant of YHWH of hosts” (*ʿārôn bərît-yhwh šəbāʾôt* – 1 Sam 4:4) and “holy ark” (*ʿārôn-haqqōdeš* – 2 Chr 35:3). Scholarly literature on the Ark of the Covenant in the Bible is extensive. For an overview, see T. Römer, “L’arche de Yhwh: de la guerre à l’alliance”, *Études théologiques et religieuses* 94 (2019), 95-108.

⁵ It is widely acknowledged that the texts in which the Ark of the Covenant plays a central role in a cultic context belong to the more recent layers of Old Testament literature. These passages are generally attributed to Priestly authors or redactors, who were particularly active during and after the Babylonian exile (6th century BCE).

⁶ The sanctuary as such is called *miqdāš* (Exod 25:8) or *miškan* (e.g. Exod 25:9).

⁷ Assuming that a “cubit” (*ʿammā*) corresponds to approximately 52 cm, the Ark would have measured roughly 125 × 75 × 75 cm, according to Römer, “L’arche de Yhwh”, 96. In their recent commentary on the book of Exodus, Helmut Utschneider and Wolfgang Oswald adopt a slightly shorter cubit length of approximately 45 cm. Based on this measurement, they estimate the Ark’s dimensions to be approximately 112,5 × 67,5 × 67,5 cm (H. Utschneider, W. Oswald, *Exodus 16–40*, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 2023, 202-3). However, given that no archaeological remains of the Ark have been discovered to date – assuming it ever existed – such reconstructions remain purely speculative.

⁸ L. Perkins, “Exodus”, in A. Pietersma, B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, 43-81, esp. 68.

Although the Ark of the Covenant is first introduced in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy – and is thus closely connected to the narratives about the wilderness period –, it occupies only a secondary role in the narrative of Israel's journey through the desert. Outside the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages, the Ark is rarely mentioned in the book of Numbers. Nevertheless, Num 10:33-36 appears to allude to the Ark's originally assumed military function,⁹ portraying it as a kind of portable dwelling from which YHWH emerges to lead Israel in battle:

³³ So they [the Israelites] set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of the LORD going before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them, ³⁴ the cloud of the LORD being over them by day when they set out from the camp. ³⁵ Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, "Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you". ³⁶ And whenever it came to rest, he would say, "Return, O LORD of the ten thousand thousands of Israel".

Similarly, Num 14:44 seems to preserve this ancient tradition, in which the Ark resembles the Greek *palladion* motif, in which a sacred object or divine representation served as a talisman protecting a people or a city:¹⁰ the Israelites "presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, even though the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, had not left the camp".

From the book of Joshua onward, the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned more frequently. In the accounts of the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 3) and the battle of Jericho (Josh 6), it plays a central role. When the priests stand with the Ark in the middle of the Jordan, the waters are cut off, echoing the parting of the sea in the Exodus narrative. During the siege of Jericho, the priests carry the Ark around the city once per day for six days while trumpets sound; on the seventh day, they do so seven times, after which the walls of Jericho collapse, and the Israelites take the city. The Ark's (original?) military function is still evident in this story.

Following the conquest of the Promised Land, the Ark is initially located at Siloh. Although Josh 18, the pericope describing this event, does not explicitly mention the Ark, it does refer to the "tent of meeting" (*'ōhel mō'ēd*), in which, according to Exodus, the ark was housed.¹¹ Subsequently, the Ark is relocated to Bethel (Judg 20:27), and later apparently returned to the sanctuary in Siloh (1 Sam 3:3).

The most extensive discussions of the Ark of the Covenant occur in the books of Samuel (1 Sam 4:1-7:1* and 2 Sam 6*). In these narratives,

⁹ Römer, "L'arche de Yhwh", 98-9.

¹⁰ See, in this respect, B.A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, Doubleday, 1993, 335-7.

¹¹ See, e.g. Exod 31.

the Ark plays a prominent role in Israel's battles with the Philistines. During an attack at Ebenezer (1 Sam 4:3), the Israelites bring the Ark from Siloh to the battlefield, likely recalling its already mentioned perceived military function. However, the Israelites are defeated, and the Ark is captured (1 Sam 4:11). The Philistines bring it to Ashdod and place it in the temple of their god Dagon, next to the statue of the deity (1 Sam 5:5). The following day, Dagon's statue is found fallen before the Ark. The next day, it is again found prostrate, this time with his head and hands severed (1 Sam 5:3-5). Terrified, the inhabitants of Ashdod send the Ark to Gath (1 Sam 5:8), another Philistine city, where a plague of tumors strike the population (1 Sam 5:9). The Ark is then sent to Ekron, where everyone is overcome by mortal fear (1 Sam 5:11). After seven months of calamity, the Philistines decide to return the Ark to Israel. It arrives in Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:13), but when seventy inhabitants die after looking at it (1 Sam 6:19), the Ark is moved to Kiriath-jearim and placed on the hill, in the house of Abinadab (1 Sam 7:1), where it remains for twenty years (1 Sam 7:2). It appears to have been occasionally taken from there to the battlefield (1 Sam 14:16).

The Ark reappears in 2 Sam 6:2, when King David arranges for its transfer from Kiriath-jearim to the "city of David" in Jerusalem. Eventually, the Ark is placed in the Holy of Holies of the temple built by King Solomon (1 Kgs 6:19).

Strikingly, the Ark is no longer mentioned in the narratives concerning Solomon's successors. The Bible does not even mention what happened to the Ark after the destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians.¹² 2 Chr 36:18, though not mentioning the Ark explicitly, implies that it may have been taken to Babylon along with the other temple treasures: "All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he [Nebuchadnezzar] brought to Babylon".

Following this survey of the Ark's appearances in the Old Testament, one final question remains: what exactly did contain the chest that was the Ark of the Covenant. According to the (Priestly) author of Exod 25:16, Moses is instructed to place within the Ark the "covenant" that God will give him.¹³ The Hebrew term *hā'ēdūt* ("testimonies") is used, and Exod 40:20 confirms that Moses placed these *'ēdūt* in the Ark.¹⁴ Deut 10:1-5 is more specific: Moses is to deposit in the Ark the

¹² Cf. J. Day, "Whatever Happened to the Ark of the Covenant?", In Id. (ed.) *Temple and Worship in Ancient Israel*, London, T&T Clark, 2005, 250-70.

¹³ It is possible that the term used in Exod 25:16 represents an abbreviated form of the fuller expression *lāhōt hā'ēdūt* ("the tablets of the testimony"), attested elsewhere; see, for instance, Exod 31:18.

¹⁴ The notion that the biblical Ark may have contained a text evokes the Mesopotamian practice of placing royal inscriptions – commemorating the foundation of a temple or palace –

two stone tablets inscribed with God's commandments, replacing those broken earlier by Moses. This view is reiterated in 1 Kgs 8:9, the story of King Solomon's dedication of the temple (and its parallel version in 2 Chr 5:10), where it is emphasized that "there was nothing in the Ark except the two tablets" that Moses placed there at Horeb.

2. The Ark in the New Testament

Despite the relatively clear depiction of the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament, the New Testament presents it differently, although it is mentioned only twice within New Testament literature. According to Heb 9:4, in full agreement with the aforementioned Old Testament passages, the Ark of the Covenant contained "the tablets of the covenant" (*αἱ πλάκες τῆς διαθήκης*). However, according to this New Testament text, there was more in the Ark: it claims that the Ark also contained Aaron's flowering staff (*ἡ ῥάβδος Ἀαρὼν ἡ βλαστήσασα*), as well as a golden urn filled with manna (*στάμνος χρυσῇ ἔχουσα τὸ μάννα*). The assertion in Hebrews that Aaron's staff and a golden urn of manna were also contained within the Ark – despite Old Testament texts referring solely to the "covenant text" – must be understood as arising from a particular interpretation of certain Old Testament pericopes.

The story of Aaron's flowering staff is found in Num 17:16-26. After the Israelites once again complain during the wilderness journey – specifically Dathan, Abiram, and the sons of Korah rebel against Aaron and claim the priesthood, prompting God to cause the earth to swallow them –, God commands Moses to collect a staff from each of the leaders of the Israelite tribes, writing each man's name on it. On the staff of Levi, Aaron's name is to be inscribed. The twelve staffs are to be placed in the meeting tent, "before the covenant text" (Num 17:19: *lip_nê hā'ēdūt*); the staff belonging to the man chosen by God will sprout. Moses complies, and on the following day he observes that Aaron's staff has indeed sprouted, producing buds, blossoms, and ripe almonds. Moses brings the twelve staffs outside, shows them to the Israelites, and returns each to its respective tribe, except for Levi's. God instructs Moses to return the staff with Aaron's name to its place "before the covenant text" (Num 17:25: *lip_nê hā'ēdūt*) as a sign to the rebellious people.

In addition to the stone tablets with the "covenant text" and Aaron's staff, Heb 9:4 also claims that the Ark of the Covenant contained a golden jar of manna. This, too, is not explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament. In Exod 16:33-34, following the gathering of manna, Moses

within chests. See, for example, M.K. George, "Ark of the Covenant. I. Hebrew Bible / Old Testament", in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, vol. II, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2009, 744-54, esp. 752.

instructs Aaron: “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations”. While one might infer from this that an omer of manna was placed in the Holy of Holies, Heb 9:4 is the only text that explicitly states that a jar of manna was placed *inside* the Ark.¹⁵

The ambiguous portrayal of the Ark of the Covenant within the biblical tradition raises the question of whether the Ark is, at any point, associated with Mary. Such a connection is obviously absent from the Old Testament. The issue, therefore, is whether New Testament literature already articulates a (typological) relationship between the Ark of the Covenant as *typos* and Mary as its *antitypos*.

3. Does the New Testament relate the Ark of the Covenant to Mary?

The Ark of the Covenant is explicitly mentioned twice in the New Testament, notably in Heb 9:4, and in Rev 11:19. However, in neither text is the Ark explicitly associated with Mary. Heb 9:4 was already discussed in the previous section. This verse appears to be nothing more than part of a description of the temple in Jerusalem (Heb 9:1: τὸ ἄγιον κοσμηκόν, “an earthly sanctuary”). Rev 11:19, by contrast, represents a different case. In this vision, one reads that “God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail”.

Immediately following this verse is the vision of the heavenly appearance of a woman, “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1). Although the woman in this text may originally not have referred to Mary,¹⁶ she was soon allegorically identified with Mary. This, in turn, might have prompted readers to see a connection between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant.¹⁷

Building on this trajectory, exegetes such as René Laurentin (1917-2017) have argued that the Marian–Ark typology is not limited to Revelation, but can also be discerned in Luke’s Infancy Gospel. Laurentin, for instance, firstly pointed to a potential typological interpretation of the angel’s announcement to Mary that she will “conceive in [her] womb” (συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ) (Luke 1:31). According to the French mariologist,

¹⁵ Somewhat historicizing, one may argue that the Ark originally – “in Moses’ and Aaron’s days” – contained not only the tablets of the covenant, but also the jar of manna and Aaron’s staff. By at the “time of Solomon”, however, it contained only the tablets. Alternatively, one might argue that the jar of manna and the staff were kept beside the Ark – as suggested by Exod 16:34 and Num 17:25 – and were only placed inside the Ark when it was being transported.

¹⁶ M. Deckers-Dijs, *Apokalyps*, ’s-Hertogenbosch, Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 2000, 125.

¹⁷ Cf. O’Carroll, “Theotokos”, 375-6.

Luke intended to refer to God's presence in the midst of the Israelites, as mentioned in, among other places, Exod 33:3.¹⁸ Similarly, the angel's promise that "the power of the Most High" would overshadow Mary (Luke 1:35) also refers exclusively to God's presence. The similarity with Exod 40:35 further suggests that "the dwelling of the Glory in the ark corresponds to the divine dwelling in Mary".¹⁹

Secondly, according to Laurentin, in his account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-44), Luke intentionally alluded typologically to the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem, as narrated in 2 Sam 6:2-11.²⁰ Several elements from this account were, according to Laurentin, subtly employed by Luke to evoke the typology of the Ark of the Covenant.²¹ Both narratives take place in Juda; in both, joyful reactions are emphasized (those of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of Elizabeth and her child); the joyful "leaps" of David and John the Baptist; the shared use of the Greek terms *κραυγή*, "outcry" (2 Sam 6:15; Luke 1:42) and *φωνή*, "voice" (2 Sam 6:15; Luke 1:44); the verb *ἀναφωνέω*, "to speak out" (Luke 1:42), used to express Elizabeth's exclamation of joy, occurs elsewhere only in liturgical contexts, particularly those related to the transport of the Ark (1 Chr 16:4,5,42; 15:28; 2 Chr 5:13); the Ark ascends to Jerusalem, just as Mary travels in that direction, and both journeys end in a house (Obed-edom's house in 2 Sam 6:10 and Zechariah's house in Luke 1:40); Elizabeth's question "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" (Luke 1:43) echoes David's "How can the ark of the LORD come into my care?" (2 Sam 6:9); finally, Mary's three-month stay with Elizabeth (Luke 1:56) parallels the Ark's three-month stay in the house of Obed-edom (2 Sam 6:11).

Whether Laurentin's interpretation of Luke's Infancy Gospel as a typological reworking of Old Testament Ark traditions is correct remains open to debate.²² At the very least, it is clear that neither Rev 11:19, nor Luke 1-2³ explicitly presents a direct link between the Ark

¹⁸ "Nous touchons ici la fine pointe de la pensée de Luc, pensée originale qui actualise de façon neuve un vieux thème biblique. Ce thème inauguré en Ex. 33,3 (cf. 33,5) et 34,9, c'est la résidente de Yahweh au sein [...] d'Israël: dans l'arche d'alliance. Avec Soph. 3 et Is. 12,6 il prend une portée eschatologique: dans Sion reconstruite, Yahweh de nouveau habitera: 'grand dans le sein d'Israël'. Luc identifie la réalisation de cette promesse avec la conception de Marie. On voit en cette conception merveilleuse l'accomplissement eschatologique de l'oracle de Sophonie: Yahweh habitera au sein de la fille de Sion" (R. Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II*, Paris, Lecoffre, 1957, 70-1).

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 78: "À l'habitation de la Gloire dans l'arche répond l'habitation divine en Marie".

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 79-81.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 79: "La scène de la visitation [...] exploite sous une forme subtile cette typologie de l'arche d'alliance".

²² See his conclusion: "Ce parallélisme implique une assimilation de la mère du Seigneur à l'arche du Seigneur" (*ibidem*, 80).

of the Covenant and Mary. That association had to wait for the Church Fathers, who were the first to unambiguously connect the two.

II. MARY AS ARK OF THE COVENANT

While a possible link between the Ark of the Covenant and Mary in the New Testament is rather speculative, it is beyond doubt that the representation of Mary as the Ark of the Covenant is very clearly present among the Church Fathers.²³ However, contrary to what one might expect, the texts in which this connection is made are rather scarce. Neither the Latin nor the Greek Church Fathers frequently refer to the Ark of the Covenant as a prototype of Mary. Moreover, this typology is hardly elaborated.²⁴

1. The Church Fathers, Mary, and the Ark of the Covenant

Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-235) is likely the first to relate the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant to Mary in a typological manner. Accordingly, Salvador-González rightly refers to Hippolytus' commentary

²³ This article is the written version of a paper presented at the international conference *Encountering Mary, Mother of Jesus: Christian Theological Reflections on Mary. Past and Present*, held at the Faculty of Theology and Religion of the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein (South Africa) on June 4th 2024. During the final phase of editing, the author came across the contribution of J.-M. Salvador-González ("*Foederis Arca* – The Ark of the Covenant, a Biblical Symbol of the Virgin Mary", *Religions* 16/1 [2025], <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010017> [accessed: April 14, 2025]), which addresses the allegorical association of Mary and the Ark in Greek and Latin patrology, in Medieval liturgical hymns, as well as in some paintings of the Annunciation from the 15th and 16th centuries. In his article – presented as a "systematic analysis of the patristic, theological, and hymnic sources of the Eastern and western Churches, in which Mary is labeled as the 'Ark of the Covenant'" (*ibidem*, 1) – several important (patristic) texts, however, are not included. The present article therefore does not overlap with Salvador-González's contribution, but rather supplements it with regard to the typological interpretation of the Ark by the Church Fathers. For Mary in patristic literature, see also T. Beattie, "Mary in Patristic Theology", in J. Boss (ed.), *Mary: The Complete Resource*, London, Continuum, 2007, 75-105 (who, however, pays no particular attention to the image of Mary as the "Ark of the Covenant"); B. Capelle, "Typologie mariale chez les Pères et dans la liturgie", *Les questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 35 (1954), 109-21; A. Louth, "Mary in Patristics", in C. Maunder (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019, 54-66. The *Brepols Latin Complete: Library of Latin Texts* (LLT) and the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) databases were primarily used to locate texts in which Mary and the Ark of the Covenant are associated.

²⁴ Earlier, according to a quotation by Leontius of Byzantium, Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 130-202) had already associated the Ark with Jesus himself: "For as the ark [of the covenant] was gilded within and without with pure gold, so was also the body of Christ pure and resplendent; for it was adorned within by the Word, and shielded without by the Spirit, in order that from both [materials] the splendour of the natures might be clearly shown forth" (A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. I: *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1993 [reprint], 571).

on Daniel.²⁵ However, in his homily on Psalm 22 – preserved in Theodoret of Cyrus’ (ca. 393–466) *Eranistes* – Hippolytus develops this idea further. This passage, however, is not mentioned by Salvador-González:

Hippolytus, Bishop and Martyr. From the discourse on the text, “The Lord is my shepherd”. And the Savior himself was a chest (κιβωτός) made of incorruptible wood (ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων). For his incorruptible and imperishable tabernacle (σκήνος), which engendered no sinful decay, was proclaimed here. For the one who sinned and confessed says, “My wounds grew foul and rotten because of my foolishness”. But the Lord was sinless, and his humanity was [formed] of incorruptible wood (ἐκ τῶν ἀσήπτων ξύλων), i.e., from the virgin and the Holy Spirit; for he was clothed within and without by God’s Word as by purest gold.²⁶

In this homily, Hippolytus does not yet directly call Mary the Ark of the Covenant. Instead, he applies the Ark to Jesus, calling him a “chest made of incorruptible wood [...], clothed within and without [...] as by purest gold”, in reference to Exod 25:10. Later in the homily, Hippolytus also refers to Mary using the same terminology when discussing Jesus’ humanity, which “was made of incorruptible wood (ἐκ τῶν ἀσήπτων ξύλων), i.e. from the virgin Mary (and the Holy Spirit)”. For the first time, the Ark of the Covenant, and specifically its composition of imperishable, rot-proof wood – this is how the Greek Septuagint translates the term *šittîm* wood in Exod 25:10 (ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων) – is typologically linked to Mary.

Similarly, a 4th-century Coptic homily, possibly misattributed to Athanasius (ca. 295–373), also goes unmentioned by Salvador-González. Alongside Gregory the Thaumaturge’s (213–270) identification of Mary with the Ark,²⁷ this homily is among the earliest to explicitly address Mary as the Ark of the Covenant:

²⁵ [...] ἐν ᾧ χρόνῳ παρὼν ὁ σωτὴρ ἐκ τῆς παρθένου τὴν κιβωτόν, τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα, ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προσήνεγκεν [ἐν] χρυσίῳ καθαρῷ κεχρυσωμένην (TLG – accessed: May 8, 2024). (“Fünftausend und fünfhundert Jahre, in welchen der Erlöser gekommen, von der Jungfrau, wie voll der Lade, seinen Leib in die Welt herausführte, vergoldet von innen durch das Wort, aber von außen durch den heiligen Geist”; cf. M. Richard, *Hippolyt Werke. Erster band. Erster Teil. Kommentar zu Daniel. Zweite, vollständig veränderte Auflage*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2000, 248–9).

²⁶ Ἱππολύτου ἐπισκόπου καὶ μάρτυρος. Ἐκ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ εἰς τό, “Κύριος ποιμαίνει με”. Καὶ κιβωτός δὲ ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ σωτὴρ. Τὸ γὰρ ἄσηπτον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀδιάφθορον σκήνος ταύτῃ κατηγγέλλετο τὸ μηδεμίαν ἁμαρτήματος σηπεδόνα φύσαν. Ὁ γὰρ ἁμαρτήσας καὶ ἐξομολογούμενός φησι· “Προσώξεσαν καὶ ἐσάπησαν οἱ μώλωπές μου ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς ἀφροσύνης μου”. Ὁ δὲ κύριος ἀναμάρτητος ἦν, ἐκ τῶν ἀσήπτων ξύλων τὸ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον, τουτέστιν, ἐκ τῆς παρθένου καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ ὅλα καθαρωτάτῳ χρυσίῳ περιεκαλυμμένος (TLG – accessed: May 8, 2024); cf. G.H. Eitlinger (ed.), *Theodoret of Cyrus. Eranistes*, Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 71.

²⁷ Κιβωτός γὰρ ἀληθῶς, ἡ ἁγία Παρθένος, ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν κεχρυσωμένη, ἡ ὅλον τὸν θησαυρὸν δεξαμένη τοῦ ἁγιάσματος (TLG – accessed: May 8, 2024): “The true Ark, the Holy Virgin, being golden both inside and out, received the entire treasure of sanctification”.

O ark of the new covenant, clad on all sides with purity in place of gold; the one in whom is found the golden vase with its true manna, that is the flesh in which lies the God-head.²⁸

In this sermon, Pseudo-Athanasius refers to the aforementioned Epistle to the Hebrews (9:4), which stated that the Ark of the Covenant also contained a golden jar of manna.

In one of his homilies, Maximus of Turin (ca. 380-465) likewise compares Mary to the Ark of the (New) Covenant, in parallel with the Ark before which King David danced. He then contrasts the two:

But what would we say that the ark was if not holy Mary, since the ark warried within it the tables of the covenant, while Mary bore the master of the same covenant? The one bore the law within itself and the other the gospel, but the ark gleamed within and without with the radiance of gold, while holy Mary shone within and without. With the splendor of virginity, the one was adorned with earthly gold, the other with heavenly.²⁹

In his *Oratio in Sanctam Mariam Deiparam*, Chrysippus of Jerusalem (also mid-5th century) applies Ps 132:8 (“Rise up, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might”) to Mary. He writes:

The truly royal ark, the most precious ark, was the ever-virgin Theotokos (ἡ ἀειπάρθενος θεοτόκος); the ark which received the treasure of all sanctification. [...] You and the ark of your sanctification; for when you shall have arisen and sealed the ark of your sanctification, then that ark will arise from the fallen state in which relationship with Eve has set her.³⁰

Hesychius (5th or 6th century), also commenting on Ps 132:8, links Mary to the Ark of sanctification, declaring it to be, “without doubt, the Virgin theotokos (ἡ παρθένος, ἡ θεοτόκος). If you are the pearl then she must be the Ark”.³¹

²⁸ O’Carroll, “Theotokos”, 50. See L.-T. Lefort, “L’homélie de S. Athanase des Papyrus de Turin”, *Le Muséon. Revue d’études orientales* 71 (1958), 5-50; 209-39, esp. 216. About the authenticity of the homily, see R. Laurentin, “Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie”, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 52/3 (1968), 479-551, esp. 548-9. For further literature, see S.C. Mimouni, *Dormition et assumption de Marie. Histoire des traditions anciennes*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1995, 416, note 203.

²⁹ *Arcam autem quid nisi sanctam mariam dixerimus, siquidem arca intrinsecus portabat testamenti tabulas, maria autem ipsius testamenti gestabat heredem? Illa intra semet legem haec euangelium retinebat; illa dei uocem habebat haec uerbum uerum; tamen arca intus foris que auri nitore radiabat, sed et sancta maria intus foris que uirginitatis splendore fulgebat; illa terreno ornabatur auro ista caelesti* (LLT – accessed: May 8, 2024). For the English translation, see B. Ramsey, *Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin, Translated and Annotated*, New York, Newman Press, 1989, 106-7.

³⁰ Cf. O’Carroll, “Theotokos”, 50; M. Jugie, *Homélies mariales byzantines. Textes grecs édités et traduits en latin*. Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1922, 178. For the Greek, *ibidem*, 220.

³¹ Cf. O’Carroll, “Theotokos”, 50. Ἀνάστηθι, κύριε, εἰς τὴν ἀνάπαυσίν σου, σὺ καὶ ἡ κιβωτὸς τοῦ ἁγιασμάτος σου· ἡ παρθένος, ἡ θεοτόκος εὐδὴλον. Εἰ γὰρ σὺ μαργαρίτης, εἰκότως ἔχειν κιβωτὸς (TLG – accessed: April 14, 2025).

In the Byzantine period, the Jerusalem liturgy even included a “Feast of the Ark” on the 2nd of July.³² The readings for this feast included: Ps 132 (with v. 8 as the anthem), 1 Kgs 6:18-7:2 (the return of the Ark of the Covenant), 2 Kgs 6:12-20 (David dancing before the Ark) and Heb 9:1-10.

Also worth noting – though overlooked by Salvador-González – is the Akathisthos hymn, dating from the early 7th century. In its 23rd stanza (of 24), one reads:

As we sing in honour of your giving birth, we all praise you as a living temple, O Theotokos. For the Lord who holds all in his hands dwelt in your womb – made you holy, made you glorious, and taught us all to cry to you: “Hail, tabernacle of God and the Word; Hail, greater than the Holy of Holies; Hail, ark gilded by the Spirit (Χαῖρε, κιβχτὲ χρυσωθεῖσα τῷ πνεύματι); Hail, inexhaustible treasury of life [...]”.³³

John of Euboea (†749) explicitly calls Mary the “New Ark”.³⁴ The same identification appears in the homilies of Theoteknos of Livias,³⁵ as well as in the *Life of Mary* by John Geometres (2nd half of the 10th century).³⁶ The *Šhimo*, the Syriac service book for weekday prayers

³² J. Crehan, “The Assumption and the Jerusalem Liturgy”, *Theological Studies* 30 (1969), 312-25, esp. 319.

³³ L.M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, 19.

³⁴ Ἰδοὺ νέα κιβωτὸς ὑπὸ τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ κατασκευάζεται μυριονταπλάσιον χιλιᾶδων κρείττων τῆς ἐπὶ τοῦ Νῶε, καὶ ἐπὶ Μωσέως· ἐκείνη γὰρ νομοδόχος, αὕτη δὲ Θεοδόχος (“Behold, a new ark is made by the Creator, ten thousand times greater than the one in the time of Noah and of Moses; for that one bore the law, but this one bears God”) (*Homilia in conceptionem deiparae*) (TLG – accessed: April 16, 2025).

³⁵ Αὐτὴ γὰρ καὶ κιβωτὸς καὶ στάμνος καὶ θρόνος καὶ οὐρανός (“For she is both the Ark and the jar, the throne and the heaven”). Cf. A. Wenger, *L’assomption de la T.S. Vierge dans la tradition Byzantine du VI^e au X^e siècle. Études et documents*, Paris, Institut français d’études byzantines, 1955, 282-3: Theoteknos compared the body of Mary, that remained virginal, with the Ark: “Cela convenait à l’arche spirituelle qui renfermait le vase de la manne et la verge d’Aaron qui a fleuri”, thus concluding that Mary indeed “is the ark (Αὐτὴ γὰρ καὶ κιβωτὸς)”.

³⁶ John Geometres mentions the Ark in the context of his *In dormitionem Deiparam* (§ 30): Καὶ οὕτως αἴρεται τὸ ὑπερουράνιον ἐκεῖνο σῶμα καὶ βαστᾶσαν τὴν ἄσπεκτον ἐκείνην φύσιν καὶ χωρῆσαν τὴν ἀπερίγραπτον, ἣ ἔμψυχος κιβωτὸς οὐχ ἱερέων ὥσπερ ἐκείνη χερσὶν ἀλλ’ ἱεραρχῶν καὶ ἀποστόλων (“And thus that supracellular body [of Mary] is taken up, bearing the uncontrollable nature and enclosing the infinite, the living ark, not borne by the hands of priests as the former one, but upon the shoulders and arms of hierarchs and apostles”). See also § 67: Τριάδα τῶν ὄλων δέσποινα, στάμνε καὶ ῥάβδε καὶ λυχνία καὶ κλίνη καὶ τράπεζα καὶ οἶκε καὶ κιβωτὲ καὶ πηγὴ καὶ κῆπε καὶ νεφέλη καὶ στύλε καὶ δίσκος καὶ πύλη καὶ ὄρος, Ἐδέμ, οὐρανὲ, θρόνε τε καὶ ναὲ καὶ ἔ τι σε ἄλλο συμβολικῶς οἱ θεόπται καὶ προφῆται καλοῦσι καὶ σοι προπάτορες (“Mistress of the Trinity, jar and rod and lampstand and bed and table and dwelling and ark, fountain and garden and cloud and pillar and disc and gate and mountain, Eden, heaven, throne and temple; what else do the God-seers and prophets symbolically call you, as well as the forefathers?”) (TLG – accessed: April 16, 2025); cf. Wenger, *L’Assomption*, 387 and 413.

– likely compiled by Jacobus of Edessa in the late 7th century –, also depicts Mary as the Ark of the Covenant.³⁷

From the beginning of the High Middle Ages (ca. 950), the image of Mary as the Ark increasingly permeates Christian theology and preaching. For example, in his famous *Prayer to the Heart of Mary*, Eckbert of Schönau (ca. 1120-1184) praises her as “the ark of sanctification that contains the writing of the finger of God”.³⁸

Finally, the Italian Franciscan theologian Bonaventure (1221-1274) should not be left unmentioned. Even though Salvador-González extensively discusses the typological identification of Mary with the Ark of the Covenant in Bonaventure’s *œuvre*,³⁹ he does not mention his saying that Mary is the *Arca foederis* [...] *in qua omnia arcana sunt recondite* (“The Ark of the Covenant [...] in which all secrets are kept”).⁴⁰ With this beautiful Latin wordplay, we may conclude this overview of texts that Salvador-González leaves unmentioned, texts that equally emphasize the growing association of Old Testament Ark of the Covenant as *typos*, and Mary as its *antitypos*.

In line with Salvador-González’s presentation, the above overview shows that this typology was rarely, if ever, fully developed in early Christian thought. Based on the available sources, it seems that the theme was only truly elaborated in the late Middle Ages. A splendid example of this is the immensely popular *Speculum humanae salvationis* (Mirror of Human Salvation), which leaves Salvador-González entirely unmentioned.

2. Mary as Ark of the Covenant in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*

Written in Latin, the anonymous authored and illustrated *Speculum humanae salvationis* – its title taken from the opening words of the first chapter (*Incipit speculum humanae saluationis*) – originated in the early 14th century.⁴¹ It is a theological compendium characterized by a typological reading of the Bible, in which Old Testament

³⁷ Cf. R.-Y. Akhrass, “Mary in the Šhimo and the Early Syriac Fathers”, *Hugoye. Journal of Syriac Studies* 23 (2020), 323-54.

³⁸ *Salve archa sanctificationis continens in te scripturam digiti dei* (T.A. Koehler, “The Heart of Mary in the Latin Tradition From the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century”, *Marian Library Studies* 25 [1996], 91-176, esp. 120).

³⁹ Salvador-González, “*Foederis Arca*”, 7-8.

⁴⁰ J.-G. Bougerol, *Saint Bonaventure. Sermons De diversis. Nouvelle édition critique. Volume I*, Paris, Les éditions franciscaines, 1993, 296.

⁴¹ According to A. Wilson, J.L. Wilson, *A Medieval Mirror. Speculum Humanae Salvationis 1324–1500*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, 26, the work should be dated between 1309 and 1324. The year 1309 serves as the *terminus post quem*, since the phrase *ubi est papa ibi est romana curia* (28,53) seems to refer to the pope’s so-called exile in Avignon, which began in that year. The year 1324 is considered *terminus ad quem*, as it appears in two manuscripts (Ms. lat. 9584 and Ms. lat. 593).

texts and motifs are interpreted as types (*typos*) of New Testament figures and events, which serve as their antitypes (*antitypos*). A *Prohemium* (proem) and a *Prologus* (prologue) precede the book's 45 chapters.

Although many manuscripts of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* have survived, nearly all follow the same structure: each chapter consists of two pages, each containing two columns with 25 lines per column, and four illustrations. The book enjoyed considerable popularity during the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the survival of more than 350 Latin copies, and by vernacular translations into French, English, German, Czech and Dutch already in the 14th and 15th centuries.

After recounting the births of Mary and Jesus, the anonymous author of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* turns in chapter ten to the presentation of Jesus in the temple, as narrated in Luke 2:22-40.⁴² According to this pericope, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem when "the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses" (Luke 2:22: αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν, "the time of their purification"). The use of the third-person plural ("their [αὐτῶν] purification") is particularly problematic, as no Old Testament law requires the purification of a woman's partner or husband. Yet Luke 2:22 seems to imply this. Some manuscripts of the Vulgate reflect a singular form – *eius* –, which could refer to either Jesus or Mary. However, since neither the Old Testament nor intertestamental Jewish texts require the purification of the newborn be purified, it is more likely that Luke 2:22 refers solely to Mary's purification.⁴³

The author of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* interprets Luke 2:22 in this sense: "On the fortieth day after Christ's birth the blessed Virgin made haste to the solemnity of her purification (*Quadragesima die post Christi natiuitatem // Perrexerit beata uirgo ad purificationis ue sollempnitatem*)" (10,3-4). However, he immediately adds: "But she herself did not have need of purification (*Sed ipsa non habuit necesse de purificatione*)" (10,5), since "she had conceived her son without a man's embrace (*Quia conceperat filium sine uirili conmixtione*)" (10,6). Nonetheless, Mary insisted on undergoing the ritual, not out of necessity, but to fulfill "the rite of Law" (*ut ritum legis exequeretur*),⁴⁴ and to

⁴² For the discussion of Mary as Ark of the Covenant in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, I rely on the recent critical edition by M. Nielsen, *An Illustrated Speculum Humanae Salvationis. Green Collection Ms 000321*, Leiden, Brill, 2022.

⁴³ This is also reflected in the Latin name of the Feast of Candlemas on February 2 (*Purificatio Mariae*), which is celebrated forty days after Christmas.

⁴⁴ Thus, she would fulfill the precept of Lev 12:2-4: "A woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed".

avoid being “judged a transgressor of the Law (*ne preuaricatrix legis esse iudicaretur*)” (10,7-9).

At this point, the typological connection between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant begins to unfold. According to the *Speculum*, Mary could not transgress the Torah by nature, for “she herself was prefigured through the Ark of the Covenant in which all the commands of the Law were enclosed (*Quapropter ipsa est per archam testamenti prefigurata // in qua inclusa errant omnia legis mandata*)” (10,11-12).

From here, the author develops a detailed typology linking Mary and the Ark of the Covenant, distinguishing between two elements: the contents of the Ark and the Ark itself.

(1) The contents of the Ark. The Ark, according to Old Testament tradition (Exod 25:16,21), contained the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. The author of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* summarizes these commandments⁴⁵ and asserts that the Ark prefigured Mary because she “was observing attentively all those commandments of God, and thus the Ark of the Covenant prefigured her allegorically (*Omnia ista dei mandata maria diligenter observabat // Et ideo archa testamenti ipsam figuraliter prefigurabat*)” (10,40-41). Not only did Mary observe the divine commandments; she also “eagerly held the books of sacred Scripture (*Et maria libros sacre scripture libenter habebat*)” (10,41-42).⁴⁶

The author further draws from New Testament tradition about the Ark, especially the already discussed Heb 9:4, which adds that the Ark of the Covenant contained not only the tablets with the “covenant text” but also a golden urn of manna, and Aaron’s staff. The analogy with Mary is evident: just as Aaron’s rod miraculously did, so “Mary blossomed and brought forth the blessed fruit of her womb (*In archa etiam erat virga aaronque quondam floruit // Et maria floruit et benedictum fructum uentris sui protulit*)” (10,43-44). Moreover, like the golden urn in the Ark that held the manna, Mary contained “the true manna of heaven (*veru manna celi*)” (10,46), referring to Jesus.

(2) The Ark itself. Turning to the Ark’s material and construction, the author of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* notes that it was made from *šittîm* wood (Exod 25:10; see *supra*), which the LXX translates as “decay-resistant wood”. The *Speculum* combines Hebrew and Greek texts traditions, stating that “the Ark of the Covenant was made from

⁴⁵ (1) Do not serve foreign gods; (2) do not use the name of God in vain; (3) keep the Sabbath; (4) honor parents; (5) do not kill; (6) do not commit adultery; (7) do not steal; (8) do not bear false witness; (9) do not covet another’s property; (10) do not covet another’s wife or slave. In listing the commandments this way, the author follows the later Roman Catholic and Lutheran classification of the Decalogue.

⁴⁶ Manuscript L reads *legebat* (J. Lutz, P. Perdrizet, *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Leipzig, Karl W. Hiersemann, 1907).

incorruptible shittim wood (*Archa testamenti de lignis sechim impu-tribili erat facta*)” (10,47). Similarly, Mary was “by no means deduced to decay or dust (*Et maria in putredine uel puluere nequaquam est redacta*)” (10,48).

The four golden rings on the Ark (Exod 25:12) represent, according to the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, the four cardinal virtues – temperance (*temperancia*), prudence (*prudencia*), courage (*fortitudo*) and justice (*iusticia*) – all of which Mary exemplified (10,50-51). These virtues are “the roots and beginnings of all virtues (*Hec sunt omnium uirtutum radices et inicia*)” (10,52).

The two golden poles used to carry the Ark (Exod 25:13) symbolize Mary’ double love: for God and for the people (*Per quos duplex caritas scilicet dei et proximi in maria designatur*) (10,54). Finally, the Ark was gilded inside and out, prefiguring Mary, who “was resplendent with virtues inside and out (*Maria intus et foris virtutibus resplendebat*)” (10,56).

III. CONCLUSION

Although the Ark of the Covenant is undeniably a biblical motif with a central role in the Old Testament and is also mentioned in the New Testament, there is no explicit typological link between the Ark and Mary in Scripture. Such an association is not part of the original biblical witness but is rather the result of later theological reflection within the Church’s tradition. It was only with the Church Fathers that the Ark gradually came to be interpreted as a *typus Mariae*.

Remarkably, this typological interpretation remains relatively limited in early Christian tradition: although the Ark is identified with Mary, the development of this association remains modest. It was only later, particularly in the late Middle Ages, that this typology acquired a richer meaning. A striking example is the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, in which the Ark is not only presented as a prefiguration of Mary, but the symbolic meaning of its presumed contents – the stone tablets of the Law, the manna, and Aaron’s staff – is also linked to aspects of Mary’s person and her role in salvation history.

The typological richness and widespread popularity of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* undoubtedly contributed to establishing the image of Mary as the Ark of the Covenant in late medieval Christianity, an image that endures to this day. As such, it serves as a valuable witness to the veneration and reverence of Mary in Christian tradition.⁴⁷ In this re-

⁴⁷ In this connection, see also G.A. Anderson “Mariology. The Mother of God and the Temple”, in Id., *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2017, 121-33.

gard, the so-called “Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, which invokes Mary as the Ark of the Covenant, played an important role.⁴⁸ Approved by Pope Sixtus V in 1587 during the Counter Reformation – though its origins go back to the 12th century –, it became immensely popular in the Catholic world from the 16th century onward. Its popularity was largely due to the special attention it received at the Italian pilgrimage site of Loreto – hence its alternative name, the “Litany of Loreto” – and was widely greatly disseminated by the many pilgrims who visited the sanctuary from the 16th century onwards, not least through the efforts of the Jesuit Petrus Canisius (1521-1597).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ After an opening plea for mercy (“Lord, have mercy on us”), Mary is invoked through a multitude of honorary titles. The petitioner addresses her fifteen times as “Mother” (“Mother of God”, “Mother of the Creator”, “Mother of Divine Grace”, ...), followed by six invocations as “Virgin” (“Virgin most prudent”, “Virgin most venerable”, “Virgin most merciful”, ...). This is followed by a series of symbolic titles through which Mary is addressed (“Seat of Wisdom”, “Tower of David”, “Morning Star”, ...). She is then invoked as “Queen” (“Queen of angels”, “Queen of virgins”, “Queen of all saints”, ...). Each invocation is followed by the acclamation “Pray for us”. The litany concludes with the threefold invocation of the Lamb of God, followed by a so-called *versicle*, a two-part verse recited alternately by the prayer leader and the people (“Pray for us, Mother of God, that we may be worthy of the promises of Christ”) and an *oratio*, a short concluding prayer. The Litany of Loreto was given a special place in the *Basilica de Casa Sancta Maria* in the famous Marian pilgrimage site in Loreto, Italy. There stands the so-called “house of Mary”, which, according to tradition, was the home where Mary lived in Nazareth. Legend holds that it was miraculously transported by angels to Tersatto (modern-day Trsat in Croatia) in 1291 to protect it from destruction by Muslims following the expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land. Later, it was said to have been brought by angels to Loreto. In 1491, Pope Pius IV recognized Loreto as a place of pilgrimage, giving it an important role in Catholic response to the Reformation through the promotion of Marian devotion. Through the popularity of Loreto, the litany became widely known to pilgrims in the 16th century, contributing significantly to its dissemination. Over the centuries, the “Litany of Loreto” has been repeatedly expanded and modified. Pope Benedict XV, for example, added the title “Queen of Peace” in 1917. Under Pope John Paul II, Mary was invoked as “Mother of the Church”. Most recently, during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the *Litaniae Lauretanae* was supplemented in 2020 with the titles “Mother of Mercy”, “Mother of Hope”, and “Solace of migrants”. The litany has also inspired numerous musical settings, including compositions by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594), Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), César Franck (1822-1890), and Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921). It has left its mark on the visual arts as well (see G. Santarelli, “*Le Litaniae Lauretane nella Storia e nell’Arte*”, in G. Basadonna, G. Santarelli, *Litaniae Lauretane*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, 7-48). For the origins of the Litany of Loreto, see, for example, W. Dürig, *Die Lauretanische Litanei. Entstehung, Verfasser, Aufbau und mariologischer Inhalt*, Sankt Ottilien, Eos Verlag, 1990; M. Hauke, “Die Lauretanische Litanei. Systematische Aspekte marianischer Volksfrömmigkeit”, in N.U. Buhlmann, P. Styra (hrsg.), *Signum in Bonum. Festschrift für Wilhelm Imkamp zum 60. Geburtstag*, Regensburg, Friedrich Pustet, 2011, 933-53. Several other honorary titles used to invoke Mary in the “Litany of Loreto” are also drawn from the Old Testament. Examples include “Seat of Wisdom” (Prov 8:22-31; Sir 24), “Tower of David” (Song 4:4), and “Ivory Tower” (Song 7:5).

⁴⁹ The oldest known Marian litany is found in a 12th-century codex preserved in the library of Mainz, entitled *Letania de domina nostra Dei genitrice virgine Maria: oratio valde bona: cotidie pro quacumque tribulatione recitanda est*. On this, see A. De Santi, *Les litanies de la sainte Vierge: étude historique et critique*, Paris, Lethielleux, 1900, 107-15.

To this day, the idea of Mary as *antitypos* of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant is reflected in some church buildings dedicated to her. The most famous is undoubtedly the one located in present-day Abu Gosh, Israel. As previously mentioned, according to 1 Sam 7:1, the Ark of the Covenant remained in Kiriath-jearim for many years. This location is identified with the present-day site of Deir al-'Azar – which may still preserve the name of the priest Eleazar, who, according to the same verse, was charged with guarding the Ark –, a hamlet of modern-day Abu Ghosh (Qaryat al-'Inab, meaning “Village of the grapes”), about 13 kilometers west of Jerusalem.⁵⁰

The church of Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant (Notre-Dame-de-l'Arche-d'Alliance), consecrated in 1924 and belonging to the French Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Apparition (Institutum Sororum a S. Joseph ab Apparitione), currently stands on this site.⁵¹ It was built on the remains of a Byzantine church dating from the 4th-5th century. Since 2017, the site around the church has been excavated by Israel Finkelstein (Tel Aviv University) and Thomas Römer (Collège de France).⁵² They have demonstrated that during the reign of Jeroboam II (788-747 BCE), a large structure was erected there – including a sanctuary – possibly serving as a northern Israelite administrative center at the border between Israel and Judah, intended to assert control over Judah and Jerusalem. The presence of a church on this site since Byzantine times, possibly corresponding to biblical Kiriath-jearim, underscores once again that the Ark of the Covenant

⁵⁰ Cf. F.T. Cooke, “The Site of Kirjath-Jearim”, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 5 (1923/24), 105-20. For the designations of the site, see I. Finkelstein, T. Römer “Kiriath-Jearim, Kiriath-Baal/Baalath, Gibeath. A Geographical-History Challenge”, in I. Koch, T. Römer, O. Sergi (eds.), *Writing, Rewriting and Overwriting in the Books of Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets: Essays in Honour of Cynthia Edenburg*, Leuven, Peeters, 2019, 211-22.

⁵¹ The Notre Dame de l'Arche d'Alliance church on Rue d'Allerey, constructed between 1996 and 1998 in Paris, also bears witness to the close connection between the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant and Mary as the new “Ark”. Likewise, in the Ethiopian city of Axum, the Ethiopian Orthodox cathedral is dedicated to St Mary of Zion. It was the church where Ethiopian emperors were crowned, and where – according to widespread Ethiopian belief – the original Ark of the Covenant was kept. According to the Kebra Negast (the 14th century national epic of Ethiopia), the Queen of Seba became pregnant after her visit to King Solomon. Her son, Menelik I, later visited his father Solomon and either received or stole the Ark of the Covenant, bringing it to Ethiopia. Today, the alleged Ark is said to be kept in a separate chapel.

⁵² For the excavations at Kiriath-jearim, see I. Finkelstein *et alii*, “Excavations at Kiriath-jearim Near Jerusalem, 2017: Preliminary Report”, *Semitica* 60 (2018), 31-83; I. Finkelstein, C. Nicolle, T. Römer, “Les fouilles archéologiques à Qiryath Yéarim et le récit de l'arche de l'alliance”, *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 162 (2018), 983-1000; Finkelstein, Römer, “Kiriath-Jearim”, 211-22; I. Finkelstein, T. Römer, “The Historical and Archaeological Background Behind the Old Israelite Ark Narrative”, *Biblica* 101 (2020), 161-85.

– though long lost (if it ever truly existed) – has held a significant place in Christian tradition.⁵³

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⁵³ Ecclesiastical discourse continues to refer to Mary as the Ark of the Covenant. For instance, Pope Pius IX mentioned this in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), in which he defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (§ 12). Likewise, Pope Pius XII referred to the Ark in *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950), where he proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption of Mary (§ 26). Unsurprisingly, in this apostolic constitution, the Pope invoked the LXX tradition of the indestructible wood (*incorruptibili ligno*) from which the Ark was made. Pope Paul VI also referenced the Ark of the Covenant (§ 6) in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis cultus* (1974), as did Pope Benedict XVI in a 2011 homily on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110815_assunzione.html – accessed: April 9, 2024). Likewise, Pope Francis referred to Mary as the Ark of the Covenant (§ 24) in the bull *Misericordiae vultus* (2015), issued on the occasion of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015-2016): “Chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, Mary, from the outset, was prepared by the love of God to be the Ark of the Covenant between God and man” (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html – accessed: April 9, 2024).