

NATALIE MYLONAS, *Jerusalem as Contested Space in Ezekiel: Exilic Encounters with Emotions, Space, and Identity Politics*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 734 (London: T&T Clark, 2023). Pp. xii + 206. US\$122.41.

In his 1946 short story *Del rigor en la ciencia*, Jose Luis Borges offers an allegorical account of the logical fallacy that occurs when someone confuses the semantics of a term with what it represents. Cast as the fictional testimony of one Suarez Miranda, the one-paragraph tale describes an age where the science of cartography had become so fastidious that only maps that were coextensive with the territory they depicted were deemed appropriate. Despite their precision, the desire for and indeed the perceived usefulness of such homologues quickly waned, and the project was abandoned as folly by future generations.

There are two related impulses generated by Borges's tale which have stimulated a range of innovations across a range of disciplines, and which provide convenient points of entry to the volume currently under review: Dr Natalie Mylonas's *Jerusalem as Contested Space: Exilic Encounters with Emotions, Space, and Identity Politics*. The first is Borges's critical insight concerning the dream of absolute validity that often accompanies the over-reaching ambition of scientific representation. The second is the phenomenological perception that space is not an objective, measurable, or given category and as such, cannot be considered immune from historical, political, ideological, or aesthetic influence, preference and/or change. Rather than a simple container in which humans live, *space*, and the principled ways in which we articulate and categorise it, constitutes a means by which we organise the world.

The "space" that concerns Mylonas is Jerusalem as represented in and through the closely analysed text of Ezekiel 16. It is a representation that is rich in geographic, demographic, and architectural detail. It is equally, if not more so, a representation that is wholly infused with emotion, that is rich in personification, and which is imbued throughout with gender specific characteristics and traits. Jerusalem is woman and wife, infant, and prostitute, with the presentation of either drawing from and simultaneously seeking to affirm conventional social norms and behaviours. In the narrative world of Ezekiel 16, boundaries are transgressed, expectations are overturned, and relationships are conditional rather than categorical. Throughout Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is personification before it is polis; example before exemplar; warning rather than comfort. It is this narrative world—whose primary function is performative rather than descriptive—that Mylonas interrogates: with confidence, with clarity, and with considerable aptitude.

In charting this journey, Mylonas's analysis engages with the spatial turn prophesised by Foucault, Lefebvre's writings on the production of space, the wide-ranging oeuvre of scholarship triggered by Febvre's seminal work on the significance and centrality of emotions and, the related realms of purity and

boundary promoted by Mary Douglas. Anchored by a profound (and seemingly personal) appreciation of the impact of spatial dislocation that defines “exile,” the 10 chapters that comprise the volume provide the reader with a detailed assessment of Jerusalem’s rhetorical and gendered depiction. The text is replete with representation and reprimand that illustrate variously the emotional understandings of, and responses provoked by, the assorted organs, orifices, and outpourings associated with the female reproductive system, and cycle. The abandoned and bloodied newborn, the naked and naïve adolescent, the adorned but conceited wife, the unabashed, insatiable harlot. Each representation of the feminine form reveals a defective, subversive character and with it, a destructive, and inevitable destiny. The salvific rescue from the open-field and the protective shield of marriage could not displace an innate, arrogant, and promiscuous self-sufficiency. Where there should be gratitude, there is grief. Instead of love, there is lust. Decency and honour are supplanted by depravity and insult. Potential futures are lost; devoured by the calamitous inevitability of biological form and the primordial cravings of genetic inheritance. The antithesis of the porous, disobedient, and necessarily chastised female Jerusalem is an impervious and dutiful male variant. Signalling secured space through controlled body, Zadokite masculinity will define a future, pure, and holy Jerusalem.

Rather than supplying background space within which action and events take place, Mylonas presents Jerusalem as an event *of* space. It is not simply (*if it ever was*) a physical datum point that might someday be returned to by an exiled collective. It is instead a structuring and structured principle of reality. It is a referential axis of legitimation and liberation where location and dis-location, the imagined and the material, knowledge and perception, along with the past, present and future play out within and simultaneously define challenge and opportunity.

In a conclusion that details “Implications of Findings” and “Directions for Future Study,” Mylonas parses this sense of continued emergence in terms of the “wager at the heart of the covenantal relationship”: choose disobedience and suffer vulnerability, commit to the prescriptions of divine election and find strength in the enduring protection of YHWH.

In deciphering the complexities of critical spatiality as they play out in the text of Ezekiel 16 Mylonas’s volume makes a significant and substantial contribution to a trajectory initially divined by Flanagan and pursued with vigour through the SBL/AAR Constructions of Ancient Space Seminar. Her account of the rhetorical function of the varied emotions communicated throughout Ezekiel 16 as contributions to and challenges on a legitimating discourse fully embraces the multiple economic, political, social, architectural, cultural, and sexual dimensions of identity and of power. The success of this task is considerably aided by her command of the Hebrew language (etymology, morphology, grammar, and syntax). Within the emotional lexicon of this biblical text, it is the largely (but not exclusively) negative emotions such as trauma, shame, and disgust that

combine to inform the “portrayal of the main protagonist Jerusalem: a gendered, personified city who *feels*.”

To offer some words on *future directions* is entirely in keeping with the subject matter and theoretical orientation of Mylonas’ book. It is also a requirement of my task as reviewer. To avoid any sense that such inputs be construed as criticism, I will limit myself to the following observations. Mylonas is correct to identify the personified city with the exiled Judahites. However, in interrogating how the suggestive, salacious, and often crude metaphors are deployed within the text, the weight of analysis is decidedly on how the personified Jerusalem feels rather than how any Judahite is required to feel about it. The distinction is no casuistic sleight of hand for within the narrative world of Ezekiel 16 the various “thick descriptions” are purposefully designed to elicit emotive responses and related acts of reflection and conversion on the part of an attentive audience. In this *fourth space* where concepts of place and time are intersecting productivities, the narrative of Ezekiel 16 forces contemplation as to which of the possible conceived and/or lived spaces can constitute “home.” An appreciation of the necessarily incomplete character of narrative presentation raises a question around the logic of Mylonas’s appeal to Mary Douglas’s fundamentally binary logic of clean::unclean and/or wholeness::holiness. Mylonas’s adoption of Douglas is both measured and circumspect. However, the central premise she chooses to leverage, that of the body as a “symbol of society,” partially resurrects the discredited thesis of Durkheim and Mauss that symbolic systems mirror social realities. What is more, it serves to prioritise and privilege the validity of one theological/anthropological outlook; one where notions of boundary represent the point at which something should stop, and not, as Heidegger once opined, the point from which something might begin. Critical spatiality, and the opportunities it affords to explore and affirm alterity risk collapse in the face of a binary choice and a singular future.

This is a book I thoroughly enjoyed, and which I wholeheartedly recommend. It evidences a critical engagement with a complex series of fields communicated in an accessible manner. It is rich in its analysis, rigorous in its findings, and reflective on its own conclusions: a welcome blend in an emerging scholar. I commend the author on bringing the volume to publication and look forward to further opportunities to engage with her work.

DERMOT A NESTOR  
Australian Catholic University

MARY L. COLOE, *John 1–10*, Wisdom Commentary 44A (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 2021). Pp. lxxx + 304. Hardcover. US\$49.99.

---

Part one of a two-part commentary in the Wisdom Series from Liturgical Press, this is a lifetime’s work crystallised into one perfect moment. As with her earlier work (*God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* [2001]),