SEÅ 87 (2022): 141–164

Spatial Possibilities for Reading Ezekiel 40–48: A Visionary and Textual Temple for a Priest in Exile[*]

RALPH ANDREW COMPTON
Mid-America Reformed Seminary and *University of Pretoria*
acompton@midamerica.edu

In his monograph defending an ongoing priestly identity for the prophet Ezekiel, T. J. Betts grapples with the apparent challenge that Ezekiel's locale far from the Jerusalem temple and its altar poses for his thesis. On the one hand, he cites the absence of the temple (due to exile) as forcing Ezekiel to adapt his priestly identity from focus on ritual performance and altar service to focus on Torah instruction. Yet on the other hand, Betts argues that the *visionary* temple of Ezek 40–48 is proof of an ongoing priestly identity: "Only a priest could have fulfilled the role that Ezekiel played in chapters 40–48."[1] At one point, Betts even refers to the visionary temple as *the* temple: "Yahweh demonstrated his recognition of Ezekiel's priestly status when he permitted Ezekiel into the temple."[2] And two sentences later, he capitalizes the word temple: "Yahweh would not have permitted Ezekiel to enter the Temple had he have been unauthorized to do so."[3] Even if these are mere typograph-

[*] I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Esias E. Meyer and Dr. Alphonso Groenewald, my PhD supervisors in the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures at the University of Pretoria, who have offered indispensable feedback on this research and the larger project of which it is a part.

[1] T. J. Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest: A Custodian of* Tôrâ (StBibLit, 74; New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 74.

[2] Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest*, 78.

[3] Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest*, 78.

ical errors, they illustrate something important: careful readers *ought* to fumble a bit when attempting to describe these temples, and contemporary research in critical spatiality has illuminated why there can be an easy interchange between a material temple and a visionary or textual one.

The following article is part of a larger research project examining how the book of Ezekiel reflects the coping strategies of a priest in exile, using well-attested vocational psychological techniques of job crafting to reframe his priestly identity following a changed in locale far from the Jerusalem temple and its altar.[4] It surveys a range of complementary studies and argues that research in textuality and spatiality provide a refined set of categories for reading the temple vision of Ezek 40–48 as part of a vocational psychological coping strategy. On the one hand, textual spatialization enables an interdisciplinary inquiry into Ezekiel's priestly identity that reads Ezekiel's literary temple as *the Temple* necessary for and capable of undergirding his vocational identity as a priest. On the other hand, spatial awareness aids a reading informed by trauma studies, a field that has received significant attention in recent decades.[5]

Several writers have explored how Ezekiel's temple vision might assist Judeans coping with the trauma of the Babylonian exile. Bennet Simon, a clinical psychoanalyst who writes about the intersection of psychoanalysis and literature, has noted several elements of Ezekiel that serve as coping mechanisms for a people facing the trauma of loss of homeland.[6]

---

[4] For a survey of sources on job crafting, see Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane E. Dutton, "Crafting a Job: Revisioning Employees as Active Crafters of their Work," *Academy of Management Review* 26/2 (2001): 179–201; Justin M. Berg, Adam M. Grant, and Victoria Johnson, "When Callings are Calling: Crafting Work and Leisure in Pursuit of Unanswered Occupational Callings," *Organizational Science* 21/5 (2010): 973–994.

[5] See, e.g., Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (SemeiaSt, 86; Atlanta: SBL, 2016); David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[6] Bennett Simon, "Ezekiel's Geometric Vision of the Restored Temple: From the Rod of His Wrath to the Reed of His Measuring," *HTR* 102/4 (2009): 434.

Especially interesting is Simon's observation that many victims of trauma use measurement, geometry, and structural detail—elements densely featured in Ezek 40–48—as "psychological defenses."[7] Likewise, Ruth Poser has developed a thorough traumatological reading of Ezekiel, treating the whole of the book as a narrative progression through clinical stages of trauma, culminating with Ezek 40–48 as "a literary representation of space and a priestly imagination of a 'safe place.'"[8] "Safe places" in a therapeutic context are usually verbal and imaginative, although they can be physical, material places—or symbols of these places—that promote restoration and healing.

In order to better understand the spatial, theoretical underpinnings that facilitate vocational and traumatological observations like these, this article will survey various ways in which both actions and space can be transformed via inscription in media, chiefly textualization. Several scholars of Jewish texts, texts in the Hebrew Bible, and southern Levantine archaeology have studied the construction of space via media which will aid this research in employing a spatial interpretation of Ezekiel's temple.

Textuality, Ritual, and the Ontology of Words: New Possibilities for Reading Ezekiel 40–48

Though the history of the interpretation of Ezek 40–48 is wide ranging in some regards, Ellen F. Davis observes that most approaches can be classified in one of two ways: (1) viewing the visionary temple as *prescriptive* (that is, an encouragement to exiles to rebuild the Jerusalem temple); or (2) viewing the visionary temple as *descriptive* (that is, repris-

---

[7] Simon, "Ezekiel's Geometric Vision," 413.

[8] Ruth Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur* (VTSup, 154; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 342, "als literarische Raumdarstellung und priesterlich geprägte Imagination eines 'sicheren Ortes' ..."

tinating the architecture of a known ANE temple—Judean or otherwise—or depicting a divinely built temple).[9]

Yet not everyone easily fits Davis's prescriptive or descriptive modes. Jonathan Z. Smith analyzes Ezek 40–48 in terms of a spatial-ideological map of four ideologies: (1) power based on a sacred/profane dichotomy; (2) status based on a pure/impure dichotomy; (3) civic and territorial; and (4) orientational.[10] He concludes:

> The "structure" (correlated with "temple" in Ezekiel 40.5) is not any extant building. It is an ideal construction, unconstrained by the pragmatics of architecture or the accidentalities of history.[11]

In a similar vein, John S. Bergsma depicts the temple of Ezek 40–48 as a "built Jubilee,"[12] extrapolating this from its dimensions, wherein multiples of twenty-five (half of a jubilee) and fifty dominate, and also from a recognition of "a larger pattern of allusions or references to the jubilee throughout the book of Ezekiel."[13] Yet Davis herself seems aware of the possibility of these alternatives, stressing that the temple vision text is actually world *creating*, that is, inviting

> imaginative participation in alternative modes of reality, which open up new understandings and possibilities for our existence simply by virtue of their difference from immediate experience.[14]

While modern bias has made it difficult for many to accept a *visionary* temple as capable of functioning in this way, it is not reasonable to conclude that this was the case for ancients, nor does it grapple with the

---

[9] Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy* (LHBOTS, 78; Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 120.

[10] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (CSHJ; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 56.

[11] Smith, *To Take Place*, 49.

[12] John S. Bergsma, "The Restored Temple as 'Built Jubilee' in Ezekiel 40–48," *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 24 (2004): 75–85.

[13] Bergsma, "Restored Temple as 'Built Jubilee,'" 79.

[14] Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 122.

way in which even moderns treat various non-material depictions as "real." Recent promotion of Mark Zukerberg's online "metaverse" reveals how the concepts of "presence," "space," and even "reality" are undergoing significant redefinition. Edward W. Soja's delineation and definition of space represents a hallmark example of these new directions. Whereas older perspectives on space bifurcated between materiality and conception, treating the former as real and the latter as imagined, Soja observes that this dualism does not do justice to way humans conceptualize space. He proposes a third category, *Thirdspace*, explaining:

> I define *Thirdspace* as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance of being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality-historicality-sociality.[15]

Yet critical spatiality is not concerned purely with ideology. Jon L. Berquist explains that

> postmodern geography never allows the discourse to remain in the imagination, but instead returns always to the material and the spatial. Space consists of "socially constructed worlds that are simultaneously material and representational ..."[16]

Thus, this research utilizes *Thirdspace* as a reading strategy for considering how Ezekiel's textual temple might indeed function as a *real* temple.[17] Yet it is critical to understand how recent studies in textuality enable this move.

---

[15] Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell, 1996), 10.

[16] Jon L. Berquist, "Introduction: Critical Spatiality and the Uses of Theory," in *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative*, ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp (LHBOTS, 481; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 3.

[17] Malachy Udochukwo Theophilus, "Kāḇôḏ (GLORY), rûaḥ (SPIRIT), and yaḏ (HAND): Divine Presence and Activity in Ezekiel (Ezek 1–3; 8–11; 40–48): *Thirdspacing* the Exile and its Implications to the Theology of Divine Presence" (SThD diss.: Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, 2020), has applied Soja's *Thirdspace* to Ezekiel studies.

In its hurry to consider the message of texts, scholars have often failed to attend to the *physicality* of texts themselves. This is especially important in the case of *ancient* texts. Though almost truistic, David M. Carr explains: "We fail to grasp a crucial aspect of the ancient function of texts if we focus exclusively on their contents."[18] After all, in both oral and oral-literate contexts, texts have a numinous power.[19] Even within highly literate cultures, ancient or modern, physical texts have an underappreciated functional breadth.

The preservation of ritual action in texts is well attested in the ancient Near East—even in biblical texts—and has been increasingly examined (chiefly in relation to Leviticus and Numbers) by scholars under the nomenclature of "narrativized" or "textualized" ritual.[20] While space does not allow for a complete survey, it is worth noting that scholarship has accepted the potential of texts for preserving ritual memory. Texts are not simply places for recording accounts of performed ritual but function as a ritual performance all its own, both by authors and readers. Yet what Scott Noegel terms "the ontology of words" suggests that texts do not simply textualize ritual but can also textualize structures.[21] Noegel even sees this "ontological understanding of words" as valuable for our understanding of creation myths,[22] which when paired

---

[18] David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

[19] Carr, *Writing*, 10.

[20] Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus* (LHBOTS, 480; New York: T&T Clark, 2009); Christian Frevel, "Practicing Rituals in a Textual World: Ritual and Innovation in the Book of Numbers," in *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism*, ed. Nathan MacDonald (BZAW, 468; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 129–150; James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[21] Scott Noegel, "The Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East," in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual*, vol. 3 of State, Power, and Violence, ed. Axel Michaels (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 34.

[22] Noegel, "Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence," 36.

with Davis's reading of Ezekiel's temple vision report as "world-*creating*," begins to suggest interesting possibilities for the expanding of textualized ritual to textualized space.

Conceptual Resources for Textualized Structures from Cyberspace

Cyberspace presents an expansion to notions of space that provides fruitful analogies for considering textual spatiality. The definitional flexibility of the term "cyberspace" helpfully allows the conceptual resources of cyberspace analysis to be more readily applied to other media. As an example, Lance Strate surveys the term noting that while it is chiefly concerned with computer science and telecommunications, "[a]t its broadest, *cyberspace* has been applied to everything from television viewing and telephone conversations to theater and cave painting ..."[23] Indeed, modern theorists of cyberspace note that our understanding of place has been stretched by the recognition of cyberspace's existence *as a place*. This research utilizes the definitions and analysis of Donald G. Janelle and David C. Hodge who argue that cyberspace is

> home to virtual worlds (e.g., virtual cities and virtual landscapes) that parallel the behavioral settings and rules of places and social networks in physical space, and some [of said worlds] that don't.[24]

New work has begun to explore how concepts and models developed for physical space might transfer to virtual space, and vice versa.[25]

---

[23] Lance Strate, "The Varieties of Cyberspace: Problems in Definition and Delimitation," *Western Journal of Communication* 63/3 (1999): 383.

[24] Donald G. Janelle and David C. Hodge, "Information, Place, Cyberspace, and Accessibility," in *Information, Place, and Cyberspace: Issues in Accessibility*, ed. D. G. Janelle and D. C. Hodge (Advances in Spatial Science; Berlin: Springer, 2000), 4.

[25] Michael Batty and Harvey J. Miller, "Representing and Visualizing Physical, Virtual and Hybrid Information Spaces," in *Information, Place, and Cyberspace: Issues in Accessibility*, ed. D. G. Janelle and D. C. Hodge (Advances in Spatial Science; Berlin: Springer, 2000), 135.

Ken Hillis's notion of "the architecture of language" suggests that "[a]ll forms of writing are spatial,"[26] initiating a tighter association between cyberspace and less technologically advanced forms of media-enshrined space. While there are ways in which cyberspace uniquely spatializes writing, this seems to be a technological advancement of potential that has been latent in all kinds of texts all along. In the face of material world limitations, a virtual world with unlimited possibilities has advantages. Cyberspace provides opportunities for negotiating material world limitation by mitigating the effects of material limits, even if it cannot eradicate them completely. Hillis offers tantalizing possibilities:

> Who and where we think we are depends, at least in part, on how space is conceptualized. If, given the ongoing proliferation and social embrace of electronically mediated communication, individuals increasingly believe that significant components of their identity are capable of relocation "within" communication devices such as on-line [information technologies] and [virtual environments], then the ways in which these people relate to space and their place on this earth will reflect this belief.[27]

Is it possible that Ezekiel's temple may serve as something analogous to or in anticipation of cyberspace, a place wherein Ezekiel could "relocate" those parts of his priestly identity that required the presence of temple and altar?

A corpus of secondary literature has begun to develop analyzing cyberspace from religious and theological perspectives.[28] Already in 1996,

---

[26] Ken Hillis, *Digital Sensations: Space, Identity, and Embodiment in Virtual Reality* (Electronic Mediations, 1; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 160.

[27] Hillis, *Digital Sensations*, 202.

[28] See, for example, the encyclopedic treatment in Heidi A. Campbell, ed., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2013). See too Morton T. Højsgaard and Margit Warburg, eds., *Religion and Cyberspace* (London: Routledge, 2005); Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media, Media, Religion, and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010); a special issue of *The Journal of*

Stephen D. O'Leary published work based on the nascent use of the World Wide Web by religious communities.[29] While it surveys a range of ways in which religious practitioners utilized the web for devotional purposes, of note is a presentation of the online religious practice of self-designated "Technopagans," who "view the internet as a theater of the imagination" with "performative rituals that create their virtual reality through text ..."[30] These practitioners note that though "[c]yberspace is without geographic features in the ordinary sense ..." there is, nevertheless, "a kind of geography here, a landscape composed of sites, nodes, systems, and channels between systems."[31] O'Leary even describes a cyber-architectural feature that resonates with the altar of Ezek 43:13–27, the eMedia construction of an altar utilized in a Gaelic Samhain media-ritual:

> The designers of the page used a program called Labyrinth to simulate an altar in three-dimensional space, upon which ritual participants placed offerings of graphic designs and images ...[32]

Here, the traditional pagan harvest festival is relocated to cyberspace, a harbinger of possibilities for other media-based spatial transferals. Interesting interfaces between cyberspace and biblical/ancient Judean traditions studied in secondary literature include a "cyber-Seder" at Lincoln Center, New York on April 12, 1998,[33] and several websites that allow

---

the Australian Association for the Study of Religion 23/3 (2010), subtitled: "New Virtual Frontiers: Religion and Spirituality in Cyberspace."

[29] Stephen O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks," *JAAR* 64/4 (1996): 781–808.

[30] O'Leary, "Cyberspace," 797.

[31] O'Leary, "Cyberspace," 799.

[32] O'Leary, "Cyberspace," 805.

[33] Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 72–78; though note the skepticism of the utility of this vignette expressed by Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of Religious Experience in Cyberspace," in *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Morton T. Højsgaard and Margit Warburg (London: Routledge, 2005), 26–27.

practitioners to send electronic prayers to be printed and placed in a crack in the Western "Wailing" Wall (the כותל) in Jerusalem, effectively minimizing the distinction between media-space and physical-space.[34] But can exilic writing even be said to *approximate* cyberspace?

O'Leary's indebtedness to Walter J. Ong on the media of writing, here applied to the media of cyberspace, shows potential in this regard. Ong has posited a correlation between writing and the restructuring of human thought and, in spite of some caveats, the utility of his work has been well-attested in studies of Hebrew writing and literacy.[35] Davis, drawing on Ong and others, isolates textualization as a key attribute of Ezekiel's prophetic book, going so far as to claim that Ezekiel's unique contribution to the prophetic corpus is his exploitation of the potential inherent in writing.[36]

While cyberspace ritual might, at first glance, seem a bridge too far from Ezekiel, several things should be kept in mind. First, scholars following Davis have admitted that Ezekiel exhibits unique textual innovations. Per the utilization of Ong by Davis and others, scholarship has increasingly recognized the ability of writing among ancient writers for opening up new imaginative vistas. This has, in turn, enabled *at minimum* an analogy between the ability of ancient and modern writers to exploit available media (whether text on parchment or clay media or electronic text making up the material of cyberspace) as a site for relocating sacred space. Second, such a move is not unprecedented in Ezekiel scholarship. Though his comment is offered only in passing, Brian Boyle's association of Ezekiel and cyberspace/eMedia is poignant:

---

[34] Stephen D. O'Leary, "Utopian and Dystopian Possibilities of Networked Religion in the New Millennium," in *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Morton T. Højsgaard and Margit Warburg (London: Routledge, 2005), 41–43.

[35] William M. Schniedewind, "Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew," *JHebS* 5/6 (2004): section 2.14.

[36] Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 39. Davis tempers perceived determinism in Ong on page 36: "Literacy is better seen as an ingredient, not a recipe for various forms of critical thinking or social development."

> One might well suggest that the sanctuary plan in these chapters is, in effect, a virtual tour, similar to a web site. The point of the text could well be then that the reader finds the divine presence in the text itself, rather than a constructed building.[37]

This latter observation will be examined further below. What this survey has demonstrated is that modern conceptions of cyberspace and eMedia share potent overlap with ancient conceptions of the numinous power of writing. In both cases, spatially informed readings of media (whether ancient or modern) prove to be fruitful for understanding the ability of texts to invoke or even recreate the presence or a given place.

Spatialized Readings of Early Jewish and Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Several ancient texts reveal imaginative views of spatialized textuality, whether explicitly or implicitly, that position Ezekiel relative to a textual temple similarly to modern religious practitioners relative to (sacred) cyberspace. Five examples will be considered.

Claudia V. Camp describes the compositional strategy of Ben Sira 44–50, employing Soja's definition of *Thirdspace* described above. She argues that Ben Sira "constructs a Temple space by means of compressed, hymnic allusions to the stories of great men from the about-to-be-biblical tradition."[38] Comparing Ben Sira's work of composing the poem to constructing an edifice, Camp describes the project as "snap[ing] two intersecting chalk lines, one horizontal, one vertical," which result in a horizontal work of history and in a vertical, edificial

---

[37] Brian Boyle, "'Holiness Has a Shape': The Place of the Altar in Ezekiel's Visionary Plan of Sacral Space (Ezekiel 43:1–12; 13–17; 18–27)," *ABR* 57 (2009): 17.

[38] Claudia V. Camp, "Storied Space, Or, Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," in *"Imagining" Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt (JSOTSup, 359; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 69.

structure.[39] It concludes with Simon the High Priest, horizontally *and vertically* "capping off" the work:

> We realize finally where we have been all along, not moving through time and narrative, but located in one place, meeting body after body, name after name, as the temple has been erected before us, enclosing the body of the scribe. The names and bodies of men constitute the *Thirdspace* that contains the name of God. It's a tall building.[40]

By means of the "body" of the high priest, Camp argues that Ben Sira has, effectively, "built a Temple through textual bodies."[41] It is not clear to what extent Ben Sira might have spatialized this temple text, but it is clear that spatiality has opened up an awareness of *textual* space with significant potential for understanding the structure and purpose of the poem.

The Mishnah provides another example of the potentialities of spatial thinking, particularly as Ishay Rosen-Zvi analyzes tractate Sotah.[42] In his introduction, Rosen-Zvi nudges readers towards the possibility of viewing text as space, specifically the text of the Mishnah as a spatialized, textual temple:

> Tractate Sotah serves here as a case study for exploring two main issues: the way in which the *Temple and its rituals are constructed in the Mishnah* and supervision of women and feminine sexuality in Tannaitic discourse. (emphasis added)[43]

The language of a temple *constructed* in the Mishnah becomes especially acute later in his work.[44] He employs similarly enticing language in the afterword, suggesting that more is signaled than simply that the temple

---

[39] Camp, "Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," 71.

[40] Camp, "Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," 76.

[41] Camp, "Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," 77.

[42] Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual: Temple, Gender and Midrash* (JSJSup, 160; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[43] Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual*, 5.

[44] Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual*, 236.

is *described in* the Mishnah, but rather that it is somehow *constructed in or by* the Mishnah. After all, these textualized Mishnaic rituals not only assume but actually "establish the Temple as a constant presence."[45] Mark Leuchter employs Rosen-Zvi's analysis for depicting Jeremiah's response to loss of homeland via the textual creation of a land mythology,[46] which begins to show the possibilities of applying spatiality to other biblical texts.

In 1947, long before the burgeoning of studies in spatiality, Patrick W. Skehan offered a novel reading of Prov 9:1, "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars." Rather than viewing this as a house with seven pillars whose construction was merely described in the text, Skehan suggests that the house of seven pillars *was* the text of Prov 1–9.[47] In a later article, he expands his analysis to posit all 31 chapters of Proverbs as a literary house, a textual model of the Jerusalem temple.[48] While his proposal never garnered widespread acceptance, due in part to the use of conjectured emendation to line up the textual "columns" of the house, some have viewed his work as still suggestive for textualized space.[49]

In Leviticus, Mary Douglas draws inspiration from Skehan, suggesting that the text of the book "projects" the desert tabernacle. She views it as "text plotted on a building,"[50] and associates this with Greek "pattern poetry" where line length, spacing, and justification are used to cre-

---

[45] Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual*, 245.

[46] Mark Leuchter, "A Resident Alien in Transit: Exile, Adaptation and Geomythology in the Jeremiah Narratives," *HBAI* 7 (2018): 318.

[47] Patrick W. Skehan, "The Seven Columns of Wisdom's House in Proverbs 1–9," *CBQ* 9/2 (1947): 190–198.

[48] Patrick W. Skehan, "Wisdom's House," *CBQ* 29/3 (1967): 162.

[49] Bálint Károly Zában, *The Pillar Function of the Speeches of Wisdom: Proverbs 1:20–33, 8:1–36 and 9:1–6 in the Structural Framework of Proverbs 1–9* (BZAW, 429; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 41, 45.

[50] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 199.

ate a visual shape depicting poem's content. Tantalizing for our proposal as it relates to the altar in Ezek 43:13–27, Douglas includes in visual layout the Greek poem "Dosiadas: the First Altar," whose stitchographic layout forms the shape of an altar.[51] In light of this, Douglas views the text of Leviticus as a surrogate for the tabernacle, the reading of which takes readers on a pilgrimage through the physical space via the textual space created.[52] While her work has been critiqued for forced correspondences in the text, it has enjoyed more favor than Skehan's proposal. Christophe Nihan, who has been critical of Douglas's Leviticus analysis in several places, does express some approval for a spatialized reading of the book:

> Douglas' recent interpretation of the book of Leviticus as a literary projection of the wilderness sanctuary is based on a correct insight (as already Ex 25ff., Leviticus does include a literary representation of the sanctuary) ...[53]

He concludes that it is indeed legitimate "to understand Leviticus as a literary and spiritual 'pilgrimage' of sorts into the 'textual' sanctuary of the wilderness."[54]

Drawing the analysis of biblical texts closer together to inscribed Levantine blessings, Jeremy Smoak offers a new perspective on the literary context of Num 6:24–26, the so-called "Aaronic Blessing."[55] When Num 6:24–26 is compared with cultic, inscribed blessings from Ekron and Byblos, it appears to be a textual adaptation of the practice of inscribing and displaying blessings in temple space.[56] Smoak contends that the proximity of inscribed blessings to dedicatory and votive offerings in

---

[51] Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 197–198.

[52] Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 230.

[53] Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (FZAT, 2/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 84.

[54] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 84 n. 74.

[55] Jeremy D. Smoak, "From Temple to Text: Text as Ritual Space and the Composition of Numbers 6:24–26," *JHebS* 17/2 (2017): 1–26.

[56] Smoak, "From Temple to Text," 4.

temple spaces suggests that Numbers, via its textual organization, "preserves spatial memory—specifically, a discursive mapping of temple space."[57] The details of these inscriptions and their respective architectural settings illuminate significant possibilities for spatializing texts, particularly by providing new exegetical tools beyond traditional literary critical tools:

> I contend that the inscriptions from Ekron and Byblos be used to encourage scholars to reflect more *upon the influence that the memory of space may have had upon literary technique and organization*. (emphasis added)[58]

Thus, rather than viewing the text of Num 6–7 as reflecting the accompanying of votive offerings with spoken blessing (that is, ritual actions performed in sequence), Smoak argues that their textual proximity reflects their spatial proximity in typical temple spaces.[59] Thus we find a model that creatively reimagines a text's ability to serve as space: "The text of Numbers formed an innovative space in which the ritual authority of the priestly blessing could be located or given new ritual expression."[60]

In sum, our survey demonstrates that spatial readings of texts have been applied by scholars to texts from a number of historical periods, representing a variety of media, and surveyed via a range of analytical tools and reading strategies. Thus, a spatial reading of Ezekiel's literary temple is a precedented and reasonable move. In their introductory remarks to *Constructions of Space III*, Jorunn Økland, J. Cornelis de Vos, and Karen Wenell suggest the following: "Within a text, it is possible to open up and construct other spaces apart from the 'real' spaces of temples and sanctuaries."[61] The studies we have surveyed have provided con-

---

[57] Smoak, "From Temple to Text," 9.

[58] Smoak, "From Temple to Text," 16.

[59] Smoak, "From Temple to Text," 21.

[60] Smoak, "From Temple to Text," 24.

[61] Jorunn Økland, J. Cornelis de Vos, and Karen Wenell, "Introduction," in *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred*, ed. Jorunn Økland, J. Cornelis de Vos, and Karen Wenell (LHBOTS, 540; London: Bloomsbury, 2016), xvii.

crete examples of this phenomenon that appear quite applicable to the text of Ezekiel.

Precedents for a Spatialized Reading of Ezekiel 40-48

This section surveys four complementary studies that employ a spatial mode of interpreting Ezekiel's temple, moving beyond the initial forays by Smith and Bergsma, noted above, and employing a more persistent use of spatial categories for understanding Ezekiel's temple. In 1986, Susan Niditch explored the "visionary context" of Ezek 40–48,[62] aided by comparison with Tibetan Buddhist mandalas. Several scholars have observed textualization and iconographic strategies in Buddhist *writings*, noting even how first century CE scholar monks argued the authenticity and authority of newer Mahayana texts by invoking the presence of the Buddha *in* the texts: "[T]he books were understood to be equivalent to the Buddha himself."[63] Niditch preceded these scholarly approaches in her comparative reading of biblical and Buddhist media: textualized visions and mandalas.

While mandalas are known visually as symbolic representations or evocations of the cosmos for use in ritual acts, Niditch notes that these are all expressions of the "real" or "highest-order mandala," that is, "the actual sacred realm."[64] These other expressions or "orders" of mandalas, crafted from a variety of media (e.g., colored sand, painted on cloth or

---

[62] Susan Niditch, "Ezekiel 40–48 in a Visionary Context," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 208–224.

[63] Jacob Kinnard, "It Is What It Is (Or Is It?): Further Reflections on the Buddhist Representation of Manuscripts," in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. James W. Watts (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 152. See too the study of Buddhist textual ritualization in Yohan Yoo, "Possession and Repetition: Ways in which Korean Lay Buddhists Appropriate Scriptures," in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. James W. Watts (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 299–313.

[64] Niditch, "Ezekiel 40–48," 212.

on the walls and ceilings of temples, drawn on paper, built life-sized from materials, etc.), while not providing immediate contact to the sacred realm itself, do give an experience of that realm. She explains that via the media mandala: "The Buddhist attempts to enter the sacred realm and to become, as it were, a part of the picture [media]."[65]

Niditch connects this to Ezekiel directly, observing how Ezekiel's media temple is one part of a cosmic portrait of restoration which includes the land/cosmos in Ezek 45 and 47–48:

> On one level, Ezekiel's vision *is* the building, *is* the cosmos, as the mandala in each of its orders is a cosmos. The vision's images, reported in words, form pillars and courtyards, and constitute a world; its images are real and have a reality as does the mandala.[66]

She further aligns the textual temple and (future) material temple:

> [T]he temple to be rebuilt is to be regarded as a full-scale mandala in hewn stone and wood rather than one of word images. Both are valid and real. Only in this way can the full symbolic value of Ezekiel's temple vision be appreciated.[67]

Thus while expressing somewhat "prescriptive" sentiments, she has still imbued Ezekiel's *textual* temple with significant spatial content.

Building on Niditch's study, Steven Tuell proposes a reading of Ezekiel's temple informed by the Eastern Orthodox Christian theology of icons. This comparison again invokes the shared media-nature of the icon and the textual temple of Ezek 40–48. He interprets Ezekiel's tour of the visionary temple as a heavenly ascent demonstrating that YHWH's presence is still available to the exiles though they are far from

---

[65] Niditch, "Ezekiel 40–48," 213.

[66] Niditch, "Ezekiel 40–48," 213. Note that the temple itself is widely understood as a representation of the cosmos. See studies in Deena Ragavan, ed., *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World* (OIS, 9; Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013). For focus on the Jerusalem temple in the Hebrew Bible, see Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 64/3 (1984): 275–298.

[67] Niditch, "Ezekiel 40–48," 213.

the Jerusalem temple, the traditional medium of YHWH's presence (so Ps 42:2–6; 48:13–14; 84:8).[68]

Much like the Eastern Orthodox theology of iconic mediation, Tuell argues that the temple had an iconic, mediatorial function:

> [In Ps 48:13–14] Zion functions in a manner very much like the icon in Eastern Orthodoxy. The Orthodox icon is understood to be a window into heaven. Reverence paid to the icon passes through to the heavenly realm, while the icon communicates to the worshiper an experience of heavenly reality.[69]

Though the exiles themselves could not re-enter Ezekiel's vision ecstatically, they could still participate in the reality of his ascent:

> Ezekiel's detailed report of his vision would appear to be, at least in part, the means of [YHWH's promised] presence ... The reader of the text is able to experience what the prophet experienced, independent of the original visionary; however, this (admittedly indirect) experience is disciplined and controlled by the fixedness of the written text ... The text of Ezekiel's vision, thus, could become an aid to devotional piety, like the icon in Orthodoxy.[70]

Tuell is not alone in suggesting that a text can be related to a visual icon. Karel van der Toorn observes similar impulses in the Bible itself, arguing that Deuteronomy's professed aniconic stance is somewhat ambivalent, complemented (or complicated!) by the iconic role of the written word itself:

> The ban on images and the emphasis on the Torah are complimentary: the Torah was to take the place of the image ... The void left by the cult images was filled by the written word: upon their doorposts and their gates, where images had formerly been placed, the Israelites would henceforth write portions of the Torah (Deut 11:20).[71]

---

[68] Steven S. Tuell, "Ezekiel 40-42 as Verbal Icon," *CBQ* 58 (1996): 661.

[69] Tuell, "Ezekiel 40–42," 661. On the "in between" function of icons, see Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 115–116.

[70] Tuell, "Ezekiel 40–42," 662.

[71] Karel van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults,*

Several Jewish and Christian liturgical traditions follow this trajectory, treating the *physical book* (whether scroll or codex) of the Bible like an icon—processing with it, elevating it, incensing it, housing it in a sacred shrine, placing it on an altar or table-throne, etc.—demonstrating the ability of a text to function as a liturgical or iconic object is recognized still today.[72] Like the mediation of heavenly reality via the media of the icon, Tuell reads the vision as mediating YHWH's temple-presence to Ezekiel, and in turn, the textual temple mediated it to the exiles, available not merely in times of ecstatic vision, but whenever one takes up the text.

Comparative readings like those of Niditch and Tuell might, like the comparisons made with cyberspace above, strike some interpreters as a bridge too far. Certainly, they are quite far removed culturally from that of Ezekiel's temple text. Nevertheless, they do demonstrate an attempt to read Ezekiel's temple account with more attentiveness to spatial categories.[73] Two more studies, however, show a spatial reading of Ezek 40–48 driven less by comparative methods and more pervasively by spatial theory. Kalinda Rose Stevenson summarizes Ezek 40–48 as

> the work of a visionary who changes the society of post-exilic Israel by changing access to space. The concern is not to provide a building plan for a building but to restructure the society from pre-exilic monarchy to a post-exilic temple society without a human king.[74]

Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East, ed. Karel van der Toorn (CBET, 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 241.

[72] For a survey of more recent practices and their historical precedents, see Richard T. Lawrence, "The Altar Bible: Digni, Decori, et Pulchri," *Worship* 75/5 (2001): 386–402.

[73] Mark S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 3–5, 109–112, warns against too quickly dismissing spatial theorizing in studying ancient texts. His warning is appropriate to studies like these as well and his proposed method for identifying spatial impulses in ancient texts is careful and controlled.

[74] Kalinda Rose Stevenson, *The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40–48* (SBLDS, 154; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 160.

Resisting the identification of Ezekiel's temple as a blueprint, Stevenson notes that the measuring enjoined upon Ezekiel yields measurements of *space*, not measurements of the *structures*. Similarly, vertical dimensions are lacking with only three exceptions (40:5; 40:32; and 41:22), leading Stevenson away from over-emphasizing the structure itself. And though it is possible to plot the floorplan based on these measured spaces (as she has done at several points in her chapter 1), there is a clear emphasis on the "proportion" of the house (Stevenson's preferred translation for תכנית in 43:10)[75] rather than its architectural dimensions. Thus these measurements, and the shapes they outline (nearly all perfectly square, indicating cosmic significance),[76] are considered as expressions of "territoriality," a term from human geography, defined as

> the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.[77]

She summarizes: "The three essential facets of territoriality are *classification of area*, *communication of boundaries*, and *enforcement of access*."[78] Ezekiel is indeed concerned with access enforcement—chiefly of the laity and the king[79]—and as she sees Ezek 40–48 as a text concerned to accomplish a rhetorical purpose in a specific context of perceived exigence, Stevenson labels the genre of these chapters "territorial rhetoric."[80]

---

[75] For her lexical treatment, see Stevenson, *Vision*, 17–18, cf. 33.

[76] John Strange, "Theology and Politics in Architecture and Iconography," *SJOT* 5/1 (1991): 27 (see especially n. 4), 30.

[77] Stevenson, *Vision*, 11, citing Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19. For more on human geography, see Stevenson, *Vision*, 151–154.

[78] Stevenson, *Vision*, 11.

[79] Stevenson, *Vision*, 164–165.

[80] Stevenson, *Vision*, 162.

But what is most significant for this article is how Stevenson shifts the parameters of typical work in Ezekiel by drawing on the disciplines of territoriality and geography:

> Human geography has to do with the social organization of space. Contemporary human geographers have argued that this priority of history over geography has been a pervasive blind spot in social science disciplines, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing to the present.[81]

It is because of this blind spot that "[s]cholars have tended to concentrate on temporal questions without giving equal attention to spatial matters. History has prevailed over geography."[82] Ironically, Stevenson pays insufficient attention the temple depicted via the territorial rhetoric. For her, the textual temple in Ezek 40–48 is chiefly a mechanism to promote a future society—admittedly centered on a future physical temple—that has redrawn social hierarchies demoting those with high standings who have abused their power via imperial policies.[83] Ezekiel 40–48 is chiefly a "social manifesto,"[84] according to Stevenson, a proposal which certainly has merit, but does not seem as indebted to the architectural detail of Ezek 40–48 that her placarding of territory and space would invite. While she is certainly correct that this temple vision is concerned with demarcating space and access, she does not do justice to the *templeness* of Ezek 40–48—i.e., why use *this* mechanism for promoting this social manifesto, and not some other mechanism or metaphor? The temple depicted in the text is treated like a husk to be discarded to get at the purported core of the text's real, social message. Stevenson's work has nonetheless done interpreters a great service and has been employed by others who have given more sustained attention to the value of the temple-space itself for its rhetorical purpose.

---

[81] Stevenson, *Vision*, 161.

[82] Stevenson, *Vision*, 161.

[83] Stevenson, *Vision*, 151–153.

[84] Stevenson, *Vision*, 157.

In 2006, Hanna Liss returned the discussion of Ezek 40–48 to a place which assigns a properly central role for the temple.[85] Part of a larger project on fictionality,[86] Liss suggests that the function Ezekiel's temple plays is driven by the command of God in Ezek 43:11 not simply to make known (הודע), but to "write" (וכתב) the "design of the house" (צורת הבית). Just as the sign-acts of Ezekiel are not merely theatrical accompaniment to prophetic speech but have a performative character all their own, Liss states:

> The same applies now to the command to write and thus for the writing down of the vision as *tôrâ*. Comparable to the performative character of the priestly texts (reliefs) on Late-Egyptian temple pylons, the literalization of the vision represents a performative action creating the reality it bears witness to.[87]

What is more, in spite of all the measuring and exactness of detail, Ezekiel is not—nor is anyone else—commanded to build (בנה) the structure. Instead: "The command to describe, i.e., to *write*, replaces the command to build the temple."[88] This produces a fascinating irony in the text wherein this structure, which excludes many from its most sacred inner places, is described in detail to those who would otherwise have no access to it:

> The literary presentation, describing this place as unapproachable as possible, simultaneously makes it increasingly accessible the more the text progresses ..., one has to notice how easily the depiction [in this text] takes form in front of

---

[85] Hanna Liss, "'Describe the Temple to the House of Israel': Preliminary Remarks on the Temple Vision in the Book of Ezekiel and the Question of Fictionality in Priestly Literatures," in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society, 92; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006), 122–143.

[86] Hanna Liss, "Kanon und Fiktion: Zur literarischen Funktion biblischer Rechtstexte," *BN* 121 (2004): 7–38; idem, "The Imaginary Sanctuary: The Priestly Code as an Example of Fictional Literature in the Hebrew Bible," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 663–689.

[87] Liss, "Describe," 142.

[88] Liss, "Describe," 142.

> the reader. The temple is erected by means of the reading. This place is inaccessible and accessible at the same time, since everyone gains the right of entry and admission simply by reading.[89]

She concludes that Ezekiel's temple is "far more than a written testimony of prophetic visionary experience. It replaces reality, taking place in the realm of history, by a reality in the 'realm of the text.'"[90] For Liss, this literary character guarantees that the temple and its holiness will never be violated again:

> Only within literary fiction the difference between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean can be upheld in such a way that the *kābôd* can "reside among the people of Israel forever" (43:7).[91]

Ezekiel as a priest plays a significant role in "officiating in" this *textual* temple, though like the structure itself, his work relative to the temple will take place in the text itself. However, by textualizing this vision, he creates the world wherein this occurs and positions himself as one able to arbitrate that world to the exiles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has summarized and expanded upon a number of studies that have explored the topic of spatiality, particularly its application to textual studies in general and to biblical studies (indeed Ezekiel studies) in particular. Whereas few commentators have employed spatially informed interpretive lenses to Ezek 40–48, those that have offer suggestive possibilities for reading. While it has provided only a brief foray into Ezek 40–48, it serves as a jumping off point for future readings of Ezekiel's temple vision and undergirds the theoretical back-

---

[89] Liss, "Describe," 135; note that Liss is citing Michael Konkel, *Architektonik des Heiligen: Studien zur zweiten Tempelvision Ezechiels (EZ 40–48)* (BBB, 129; Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2001), 249.

[90] Liss, "Describe," 143.

[91] Liss, "Describe," 143.

drop for the vocational psychological and traumatological readings noted above. Furthermore, it steers readers between the "Scylla-and-Charybdis-like" false choice of viewing space as *either* real *or* imagined. This *Thirdspace* better accounts for the variegated ways in which people actually relate to space via media.