
The present volume is based on the author's doctoral thesis at the University of Bergen, Norway (2006) under Einar Thomassen. As she delineates in chapter 1, Lied's objective is to examine Israel's land as a redemptive category in 2 Baruch (hereafter 2B) through the grid of 'spatial epistemology.' Lied argues that 2B posits the creation, rather than replacement, of sacred space using critical spatial theory. On such a reading, people create and shape space by their practices (obedience to the Law, social practices, etc.). From this perspective, the author contends that 'the collective righteous praxis of Israel... transforms a given area into the Land' (p. 16). The Land is not territorial or locational but 'fuzzy and fluid' and 'dependent on the transformative ability of righteous praxis' (p. 17).

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the period of the first temple as presented in 2B. Chapter 2 deals with Baruch's concern for the full of the temple and the consequences of destruction and dispersion on the further existence of Israel. Chapter 3 looks at 2B's construction of the land of the past, specifically the importance of kingship, the inauguration of the temple, and the effects of apostasy on the extent of the land. Chapters 4 and 5 concern the spaces of the end-time. Chapter 4 explores how 2B imagines an alternative spatial building in the Kidron Valley where Israel can survive through the end-time and secure future redemption. Chapter 5 examines the consequence of Baruch's move to Hebron. Chapters 6 and 7 address the time of redemption. In chapter 6 Lied examines the land in the Messianic era and its function and place in liminal space. Chapter 7 discusses how Israel takes possession of the other world and attempts to answer the main question of this study: 'Does 2B reject Israel's Land as a redemptive space belonging to the corruptible world only, or does it transform the Land to unite the central space of the covenant with the other world as the ultimate space of redemption?' (p. 30). The conclusion (chapter 8) largely summarises the work.

This is a carefully researched piece of work that deserves full consideration. My concerns are methodological in nature. First, Lied repeatedly poses either-or questions prior to examining evidence and necessarily limits the conclusions she may draw. This reader is left with the impression that there are two and only two alternatives for many key issues she addresses prior to her examination of evidence (pp. 11, 15, 16, 30, cf. 243, 305, etc.). Second, her employment of spatial theory is helpful for heuristic purposes, but seems to require her to presume rather than demonstrate that praxis 'creates' sacred space. One cannot help but wonder whether the ancient author(s) / reader(s) would embrace such abstractions. Lied does, however, provide a helpful orientation to the complicated eschatology and rhetoric of 2B. She also raises important questions about the place of land within the eschatological scheme of apocalyptic Judaism after 70 CE that warrants serious attention.

DANIEL M. GURTNER
Bethel Seminary, St Paul, MN


This book is primarily interested in rabbinic Judaism's understanding of the family, using the treatment of levirate marriage as a case. The first two chapters serve an introduction. Chapter 1 offers a brief introduction to levirate from a cross-cultural perspective. Levirate is the custom whereby the brother of a man who dies childless
marries his wife. The custom is widespread in traditional societies worldwide, with some variation. Cultures that practice levirate tend to be exogamous and patrilocal, and tolerant of polygyny. Chapter 2 discusses four biblical passages: Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Genesis 38, Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 and Ruth 3-4. Weisberg denies that the marriage of Ruth and Boaz is a levirate union, but believes it is germane to the rabbinic discussion. The passages in Leviticus deal with incest rather than levirate. Since they expressly forbid marriage with a brother’s wife, they render levirate marriage anomalous. Deuteronomy both mandates levirate marriage and provides an exemption for a man who is unwilling. In Weisberg’s view, the situation in Ruth resembles the custom of widow inheritance, whereby a man who redeems the property of a deceased relative should also marry the widow. This custom addresses the same basic problems as the levirate—the deceased man’s lack of heirs and the widow’s need for support.

There is very little discussion of levirate in Second Temple texts, although Josephus does discuss it, and there are passing references in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. In contrast, the Mishnah and Tosefta devote an entire tractate (Yevamoth) to the subject. The model developed, and assumed by the Talmuds, is that the death of a childless man creates a bond between his widow(s) and his brother(s), but the bond is created only when the individuals are potential parents and can legally marry. While Deuteronomy was primarily concerned with providing an heir for the dead man, the Mishnah is concerned with clarifying the status of the widow.

In chapters 3 through 6, Weisberg discusses aspects of the family in the Talmuds. Chapter 3 deals with kinship and family structures in texts dealing with mourning, testimony, incest and inheritance. Chapter 4 deals with relationships between brothers. Chapter 5 deals with the status of the widow. Chapter 6 discusses the child of the levirate union. The idealized rabbinic family is not the extended, but the nuclear family. The rabbis amended the levirate laws in several ways, to address the disadvantages they presented for the levir. They transformed levirate into ‘normative’ marriage, formalising it with a declaration of intent and requiring the same waiting period as for any remarriage by a widow. Moreover, they assigned the paternity of children born in such a marriage to the levir, and he acquired the estate of his deceased brother when he married. While the rabbis preserved the levirate in name, they undercut the rationale of providing heirs for the deceased.

Weisberg brings a cross-cultural perspective to the study of levirate, both in the opening chapter and in chapter 6, where he contrasts the rabbinic prescriptions with the Roman institution of adoption. Otherwise, this is primarily a study of rabbinic texts, and the conclusions are not strikingly new. The book is clearly written, however, and the treatment is comprehensive. It is an excellent introduction to the subject of levirate marriage in ancient Judaism.

John J. Collins
Yale Divinity School


Whereas most contemporary studies of ancient Palestinian Jewish society still refrain from taking advantage of sociological and anthropological models and approaches and draw historical conclusions on the basis of a mere analysis of the rabbinic literary sources, for the book under discussion here the opposite is true: various sociological and anthropological theories are presented and superimposed on a construct of ancient Judaism that is not based on the author’s own analysis of the sources but