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Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions: Emotions Associated with Jewish Prayer in and around the Second Temple Period. DCLS 26. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. Hardcover.

Pp. viii + 409. €119.95 / \$168. ISBN 9783110369083

Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions represents an early attempt in the field of Second Temple Judaism to join the growing academic conversation devoted to understanding the role and place of emotions in history. The book's contents are the proceedings of a conference held on 2–5 February 2014 at the University of Haifa, sponsored by the International Society for Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature (ISDCL) and the University of Haifa. The book has a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. I will first provide a brief overview of the volume's contents, and then mention some of these strengths and weaknesses.

The vast majority of the contributions focus primarily on lexical studies and word inventories related to emotions/feelings across a diverse group of (mostly) Second Temple period texts (Christine Abart on Psalms 33, 16, 19; Friedrich Reiterer on 2 Maccabees; Núria Calduch-Benages on Sirach 22:27–23:6; Markus Witte on the Wisdom of Solomon). Some word studies are used as the basis for exegetical or narratological reflections on how careful attention to the emotions of a story or prayer further enhances an appreciation of the literary, liturgical, and/or theological qualities of a text (Thomas Elßner on the laments in Baruch; Beate Ego on LXX Esther; Michael Duggan on 1 Maccabees; Barbara Schmitz on Judith and Holofernes; Oda Wischmeyer on Mark 14:32–42). Others add or focus on comparisons, either with textual variants of the same document (Renate Egger-Wenzel on Tobit; Dalia Marx on the Prayer of Susanna), or with documents that exemplify a growth in Israel's traditions in which emotions and emotional language are further developed (Kristin De Troyer on the development from Ezra to Esdras; Simone Paganini on Jubilees; Eve-Marie Becker on Rom 8:15 and Acts 7:60). Some contributions discuss prayer and are less concerned with emotion other than to note the use of emotion words (Jonathan Ben-Dov on prayer and prophecy; Moshe Lavee on Aseneth's prayer in Joseph and Aseneth; Ursula Schattner-Rieser on Aramaic prayer texts from Qumran; Asaf Gayer on the concluding hymn in 1QS). Some contributors, such as Reiterer, Witte, and Schmitz, reflect on the difficulty of studying emotion in history and offer some basic definitions and theoretical guidelines. Angela Kim Harkins's article is the most innovative and exemplary in this regard, at least in terms of integrating insights from cognitive and social sciences in her understanding of the Hodayot, in particular how the so-called Community Hymns were performed to arouse or affect the emotions of the participants.

The collection of articles provides a diverse sampling of the sources from the Second Temple period, and has made available to the reader a good starting point for locating texts that are concerned with emotions and prayer. Since emotions are primarily communicative, the meaning of an emotive word determines one's ability to perceive it. Thus determining the meaning of a word in its original language and noting the changes associated with it, either by textual emendation or ancient commentary, is a requirement for those who wish to study emotions in history. The contributions that seek to understand the precise meaning(s) and context of emotion vocabulary have moved the discussion forward in this regard; other contributions rightfully observe that emotions are socially managed to varying degrees and are often re-appropriated in different socio-historical contexts. The work of tracing these textual and social contours is not easy, and Reiterer's concluding comments in his article are worth reiterating here: "The emotional dimensions [of an ancient text] are much more difficult to capture and are also more complicated to describe" than other aspects of the text (141–42).

Reiterer's statement captures a problem that pervades much of the book: an approximate modern translation of an emotion word is often deemed enough to understand the word's meaning in its historical context. Throughout the volume emotion vocabulary remains frustratingly undefined, and often there is a lack of distinction between the meaning of emotive words in their literary context, in their socio-historical context, and their meaning today. Attempts at such diachronic distinctions are what bring meaning to the study of history and need to be considered.

The cause of this lack of precision, and one of the most glaring problems that pervades much of the book, is the absence of any robust discussion about how to study emotions in history, and the potentially fruitful outcomes of studying emotion together with prayer. Since both prayer and emotion are essentially communicative, the study of these two topics together may appear self-evident. But as features of social history, prayer and emotion are very complex topics, and our understanding of both—particularly the latter—has changed dramatically since the 1970's. Many of the important studies on emotion in history that were instrumental in these changes are not cited or utilized, and even the most basic question of definition, i.e., "What is emotion?," is not asked until pg. 177. The question "What is prayer?" is not asked at all, although for this discussion we have considerably more resources that would be more familiar to the readers of the DCLS series.

A more concerted effort to plod through the initial difficult work of theory and method could have potentially provided some ways to navigate the pitfalls