

Reading with an “I” to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot through the Lens of Visionary Traditions

By Angela Kim Harkins

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Angela Kim Harkins’ new book, *Reading with an “I” to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot Through the Lens of Visionary Traditions*, is a valuable contribution to the field of Qumran studies; the book joins Carol Newsom’s *The Self as Symbolic Space* as a work that opens up the study of the hodayot (a set of hymn-like compositions found in the Qumran corpus) to theoretical readings. However, Harkins’ understanding of the hodayot differs markedly from Newsom’s view. Harkins argues that the hodayot’s “rhetorical use of the ‘I’ and vivid language of embodiment” generated an experience of ascent for the text’s ancient reader (3). She suggests the *Maskil* (an enlightened instructor in the Qumran community) would have performed these texts and that his display of emotion and transformation during these recitations was one way of maintaining his power within the community. The book is dense, applying both affect theory and critical spatial theory to the texts, and assumes, indeed requires, the reader’s familiarity with the hodayot. In the introduction Harkins lays out her “proposal” that ancient readers of the hodayot read them with the aim of achieving an “ascent experience” and gives the reader a clear road map for the rest of the book.

Chapter one consists of a nuanced overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the book, mainly interrogating the post-structuralist idea of embodied subjectivity. While Harkins looks to Judith Butler’s work for guidance, and points to the importance of Bourdieu’s work on the *habitus* for looking at embodied subjectivity, perhaps the most important scholar for Harkins’ reading of the hodayot’s embodied subject is actually Saba Mahmood. Mahmood’s work employs Aristotle’s understanding of the *habitus*, which is pre-industrial and thus better suited to non-modern and non-western societies and sees ritual practice as a pedagogical process that transforms the body, creating an embodied subjectivity, and Harkins reads the hodayot through this lens (62).

In chapter two, Harkins argues that the rhetorical ‘I’ and the embodiment language of the hodayot, and particularly the Teacher Hymns, do not represent the real experiences of a single individual, but create an “imaginal body,” with which the ancient reader is invited to identify (72). Harkins further argues that a variety of individuals over a period of time composed the hodayot, and that the hymns gained authenticity only when emotionally (and, hence, successfully) performed (113). Here, Harkins looks to performance studies, particularly the work of Stanislavsky, as key to understanding the role of performed emotions in the hodayot. Harkins also notes the cultural and temporal variability of emotions; what an ancient viewer would view as ‘authentic’ emotion is quite different from what a modern viewer would.

In chapter three, Harkins enters the realm of spatial studies, looking at the way space and movement function in the hodayot. Harkins argues that the hodayot represent a journey, starting in a place of fear and punishment, progressing to paradise, and ending with the

entrance into heaven (115). Harkins draws on concepts from critical spatial theory, particularly Edward Soja's ideas of *Secondspace* and *Thirdspace*, adapting these terms to her own ends throughout the remainder of the book. In the realm of the hodayot, Harkins proposes seeing Secondspace as the "religious geography constructed by the text," akin to Foucault's understanding of utopia (116-117). She reads the hodayot in a synchronic manner here, viewing the spatial and phenomenal language of the hodayot as "affective scripts to be used in a Secondspatial reenactment of religious experience" (120). The Secondspace of the hodayot is a strange terrain, wherein descriptions of the real and the imagined are conflated, creating a space fit for a psychological journey but impossible for any mapmaker to plot. In this respect, the landscape of the hodayot is akin to the otherworldly landscapes of other early Jewish texts, particularly ones that involve suffering seers, such as Enoch (146-8) and Daniel (148). In contrast Thirdspace, for Harkins, "is the realm of lived experience where the creative process of transformation is possible and power is reconfigured" (117).

Harkins moves from Secondspace to Thirdspace in chapter four, reading the hodayot diachronically. Harkins argues that the hodayot that display examples of Thirdspace are the works of those who transcended the boundaries of Secondspace during the recitation and performance of other hodayot. Here, Harkins works with George Nickelsburg's concept of "*anthropologizing*" (156) and focuses on three recurring (and violent) motifs in the hodayot: the woman in labor, the ship in the storm, and the besieged city. Harkins argues that the Secondspace terrain of "1QH XI, 6-19 + 20-37 led to the exegetical generation of the hodayah 1QH XIII, 22-XV, 8" (190). In other words, the reader of the first hodayah was able to identify so closely with the "I" of the text that they moved beyond replicating that experience to having their own experience via the imaginal body of the first hodayah. Harkins makes clear the reason for recording this experience of Thirdspace as a new hodayah by returning to Stanislavsky. Stanislavsky observed that disciplining the emotions requires extensive training and a certain frame of mind that few possess (188); few likely experienced the Secondspaces of the hodayot, let alone the Thirdspaces of unique experience. Thus, when one not only successfully experienced the Secondspace of a hodayot, a rare feat on its own, but then continued the journey into uncharted waters (a passenger on that ship in the storm), one needed to record this new journey as its own hodayah.

In the fifth and final chapter of the book, Harkins looks at the paradisiacal imagery of the hodayot, and posits that these garden scenes are "reports of heterotopic experiences"; the textual gardens are boundaries between the space below and the "heavenly space" within the realm of the hodayot (218). Here, she draws attention to Foucault's description of earthly gardens as examples of heterotopias, unreal real places, which are also liminal places (208-10). Harkins glances at the garden paradise in 1QH XIII, 22-XV, 8, before turning her attention to the longer passage regarding the well-watered paradise of 1QH XVI, 5-XVII, 36. Harkins remarks on the similarities between these passages and the experiences of Enoch and Daniel in their respective texts, suggesting that the way the passages in the hodayot differ from Enoch and Daniel potentially indicates additions made by the author from personal experience (244). Following this description of a garden paradise, she notes, there is a full blank line, and then a switch in location and in tone: the "I" of the hodayot has crossed over into the heavens and offers joyful blessings (248). Not only does garden imagery signal the boundaries of heaven, the

language of blessing signals heaven itself (250). Both the scenes of gardens and those of heaven represent Thirdspace in the hodayot, with 1QH XVI, 5-XVII, 36 a particularly fulsome example of this.

It is exciting to read a monograph devoted to thinking about the hodayot, particularly one that attends to Carol Newsom's lingering question of what the hodayot *do*. Harkins' observations about the hodayot and her proposals concerning their manner of composition are intriguing and will provide food for fruitful discussion for years to come. I am curious, however, about the role Harkins sees for the hodayot within the liturgical space of Qumran. Where was the Maskil reciting these hodayot and how did this recitation fit into the larger community? Harkins repeatedly reminds the reader that her project is not the same as Newsom's project, but Harkins is the one to invoke Newsom's question and then leave the sociological and indeed political aspect of it unanswered. While Harkins' focus is clearly cerebral, she does claim that the successful performance of the hodayot would have been a politically powerful act—a suggestion that she does not actually develop. While one can only speculate as to the reasons for this omission, I would like to know what Harkins' theories on the matter are. It is clear from Harkins' engagement with affect theory that she is not afraid to enter the realm of speculation.

In contrast to Harkins' ownership and deft use of affect theory, her deployment of spatial theory can be confusing. While Harkins cites Lefebvre and Soja in her introduction, she does not address Lefebvre's theory explicitly, but works with aspects of only Soja's work. However when engaging with Soja, Harkins skips over the critical idea of Firstspace altogether, and her use of the terms Secondspace and Thirdspace do not match up with the definitions advanced by Soja. Harkins does qualify her use of the terms on page 118, noting that she (rightly) wishes to avoid the Marxist overtones of Lefebvre and Soja's definitions (standing as they do in opposition to the post-industrial understanding of space), and invokes Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces" to help her redefinition of the terms. But, unlike Harkins' deployment of Mahmood's rehabilitated Aristotelian *habitus* for understanding pre-industrial societies, this deployment works less well, as Foucault did not create his heterotopia to nuance Soja's concept of Thirdspace. To use Soja's term, but mean Foucault's (less than clear) term, can confuse the reader or, as the case may be, the author herself, as Harkins calls Thirdspace a Foucaultian heterotopia on page 118 and Secondspace (*qua* garden paradise) a Foucaultian heterotopia on pages 208 and 215. It is entirely possible Foucault would have agreed with both of Harkins' designations, particularly since Foucault sees the garden as the original heterotopia (Foucault, 25) and Soja understands Foucault's heterotopia to match up with the "micro- or site geography of Thirdspace" (Soja, 157), but that does not clarify the point for the average reader. Is a heterotopia in the hodayot a Secondspace or a Thirdspace, and do the rules change if that space is a verdant garden?

Critical spatial theory is complex, and one theorist's Thirdspace is not another theorist's Thirdspace. Throughout her discussion of space in the hodayot, Harkins cites fellow Biblical scholars working with space rather than from spatial theorists such as Lefebvre and Soja. Perhaps highlighting this fact, the way Harkins highlights her use of Derrida via Butler and Bourdieu via Mahmood, would help clarify the spatial portions of the book. That aside, I applaud Harkins' attempt to engage the hodayot by way of critical spatial theory and find her supposition regarding the garden scenes as thresholds to heaven an exciting suggestion.

On a final note, the book itself contains numerous typographic errors which result in meaningless sentences that make following the book's thick argument more difficult. While this may be evidence of Harkins' own Thirdspace experience of the hodayot, a copyeditor ought to have caught these errors and set them aright for those of us trapped in the Firstspace of the academy.

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