Stefan C. Reif and Renate Egger-Wenzel, eds.


This volume, the proceedings of a 2014 conference at the University of Haifa, builds upon the growing interest in emotions in ancient Jewish texts. As wellsprings of emotional expression, prayers are a particularly rich genre in which to explore that subject; as Ursula Schattner-Rieser (“Emotions and Expressions of Emotion as a Didactic Guide as to How to Pray: _B'rakhot_ in the Aramaic Prayers of Qumran”) suggests, prayer is a “dialogue with God in which one can express the deepest feelings and longings of one's soul” (276).

Yet, in practice, emotions are not only communicated orally; they are both embodied and performed, a fact that the emotional terminology often reflects. Thus, Schattner-Rieser demonstrates the role of physical gestures and weeping in the Qumran Aramaic prayer texts and Calduch-Benages highlights terminology related to the eyes and the belly in Ben Sira. Angela Kim Harkins’ contribution (“A Phenomenological Study of Penitential Elements and Their Strategic Arousal of Emotion in the Qumran Hadayot [1QH* cols. 1[?-8]”) is especially important in this regard, as she notes that “the body’s expression of emotion is not the spontaneous expression of an interior state, but rather ... is instrumental in the generation of a desired cognitive state” (301-2). The notion of emotional scripts and performance reaches its most extreme form when emotion becomes mandated by and frozen in the form of legal discourse, a transformation documented by Moshe Lavee in his study of the emotions associated with conversion in Second Temple and rabbinic literature (“From Emotions to Legislation: Asenath’s Prayer and Rabbinic Literature”).

The performative nature of emotion helps us understand the goal of memorializing emotional prayer in writing. As both Schattner-Rieser and Kim Harkins emphasize, emotional prayers, such as those in some of the Qumran texts, can serve a didactic aim, teaching those who recite other prayers, or even those prayers themselves, how to pray and what to feel while doing so. Calduch-Benages makes similar observations about the prayer in Sir 22:27-23:6, which she contends serves to communicate to the supplicant how to respond emotionally in circumstances similar to those of the prayer. When the emotional prayer is attributed to an authoritative personality, such as the Maskil in a long section of 1QS treated by Asaf Gayer (“The Centrality of Prayer and Stability of Trust. An Analysis of the Hymn of the Maskil in 1QS 1X, 25b-x1, 15a”), in Jesus’ prayer in Mark 14:32-42 analyzed by Oda Wischmeyer (“Prayer and Emotion in Mark 14:32-42 and Related Texts”), or in Jerusalem’s emotional speeches in the Book of Baruch discussed by Thomas R. Eißner (“Emotions in Jerusalem’s Prayer: Baruch and Lamentations”), the didactic dimension of prayer is especially prominent.

Many of the emotional prayers analyzed in the book do not appear in liturgical but rather in literary texts. In such cases, one must not simply observe the presence of emotion in prayer but also seek to understand the function of such emotions in their respective literary contexts. Michael W. Duggan (“1 Maccabees: Emotions of Life and Death in Narrative and Lament”) argues that the prayers highlight the reversal of fortune for the Jews, which is an important theme in the book generally; Beate Ego (“Prayer and Emotion in the Septuagint of Esther”) demonstrates that Esther’s prayer in the Greek Additions to Esther draws together the different theological strands of the surrounding narrative; Simone M. Paganini’s analysis (“Adjusting the Narrative Emotions