

A Bakhtinian Reading of Narrative Space and Its Relationship to Social Space; Or, Finding the Lost Tribe of Levi and Why It Matters: A Study in Voice, Space, and Power

by

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Narrative literature potentially supplies both a *model* for thinking Thirdspatially and a *site* of Thirdspace from which lived First- and Secondspatial possibilities can be abstracted and analyzed. Spatial analysis that brings narrative to bear, can in other words, provide a window, precisely through literature, into the ancient world. Critical spatiality theory provides, then, one tool with which to theorize in turn the use of narrative texts in social-historical reconstruction.¹

It would be an understatement to suggest that the Palestinian question continues to be a fragile linchpin precariously holding together the explosive and fluid dynamics of Middle Eastern social and political life. The events of September 11, 2001, thrust onto the dominant, western, Secondspace² cultural stage of the Judeo-Christian United States and Europe, the third of Abraham's children, Islam. The global implications of this sudden emergence of a powerful voice from Thirdspace invisibility into Secondspace consciousness become immediately obvious. Front-page news presents us with the rhetoric of a war on terror and windows of opportunity for liberation emerging seemingly from anywhere and everywhere.

Since so many of the issues hinge on matters of voice, space, and power, this paper proposes to focus on those themes, particularly as they impact readers of sacred texts, texts often presented as the source of legitimation for present action. As will become apparent, it will be the thoughts on reading from the Russian literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, and their usefulness for an approach to a

¹ 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. Paula M. McNutt and David M. Gunn, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 359* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 68.

² As will be clear to members of the Constructions of Ancient Space seminar, the vocabulary of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace comes from Soja and his adaptation of concepts from Lefebvre: Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991).

study of Levi and the Levites of ancient Israel that is offered as our point of entry.

Introduction: We the Reader

The life of Mikhail Bakhtin is a story in itself; although he predates postmodernism, his is a story which lends itself to postmodern concerns. He learned by experience what it meant to write from the margin of a social order. The experience of his early life, as is often the case, shaped the direction his thoughts on language and communication would develop. He was born in 1895 in the provincial town of Orel south of Moscow into a family with aristocratic background. His biographers refer to his family as untitled nobility. His great-grandfather had contributed money from the sale of 3,000 serfs to the founding of a military academy in Orel. His grandfather founded a bank; and his father worked as a manager in the family business. Mikhail had a German governess who tutored him in the classics. With a brother and three sisters, the children would often act out stories from the Iliad and the Odyssey. At age nine he moved to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, then under Russian rule. It was a town of mixed population and languages. Life there was an experience that would inform his ideas on heteroglossia—or multi-linguagedness. He would learn that it was that kind of cultural condition that would preserve one against premature settling in on singular and hegemonic ideological positions. He recognized that there were even multi-language systems within a single language. He read widely in European philosophy as a young boy, especially influenced by German thinkers like Kant. One of the issues of the day was how does the mind make sense out of experience. Bakhtin's ideas about dialogue have their beginning in Kant's categories of the mind organizing sensory experience to produce meaning.

He had an older brother Nikolai who was his most significant other with whom he dialogued and engaged in many intellectual conversations. From Vilnius the family moved to Odessa, another cultural center. This part of Europe was filled with the intellectual ferment that would be a prelude to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and civil war, challenging the older czarist regime and social organization. Both Nicolai and Mikhail studied at the university at Petersburg in the years 1914-1918 coinciding with World War I. Petersburg was a center of much of the ferment in the region. Bakhtin would be drawn into debates about political events. He could relate his thinking to Marxist thought, but was not obviously a full-fledged Marxist given the fact that his family experience benefited from the older social order. With the Revolution, Nicholai would side with the White Russian czarists and eventually leave, while Mikhail remained behind. Given the Revolution and subsequent Civil War, he faced the challenge

of formulating his own voice, in the words of his biographers, "...under the most adverse conditions, including exile, scholarly neglect, and life at the edge of Russian intellectual life far removed from the great libraries."³

The 1920s were an exciting time for intellectual creativity. Bakhtin participated in a number of discussion groups in these early heady days. With many of the older scholars leaving the country, this created a climate of rapid social advancement for younger gifted thinkers. Since Bakhtin's Marxism was qualified, however, he was a bit out of step to benefit fully from that social situation.

Times turned difficult when Stalin came to power in the mid-20s. Great numbers of intellectuals were purged. Bakhtin was arrested in 1930, though a book he had published on Dostoevsky⁴ drew favorable response from key people in high places. An illness led officials to change the site of Bakhtin's exile which enabled him to survive even under those difficult conditions. A second major work, this one focused on Rabelais and the theme of carnival was written in the 40s. Bakhtin would resurface in the 60s and 70s rediscovered by loyal students, finally finding a context in which his brilliance was widely recognized. In recent days he has captured the attention even of Western biblical scholars. For instance we have, among others, the sustained work of Robert Polzin⁵ in the Deuteronomistic history using Bakhtinian categories and the excellent recent introduction of Bakhtin to biblical scholars by Barbara Green.⁶

In 1970, toward the end of his career, Bakhtin was asked what he thought of the state of literary scholarship in 1970. His response appeared in the November 1970 issue of *Novy Mir* – a journal described as "a 'liberal' monthly...read by most Soviet intellectuals."⁷ Bakhtin argued that literary scholarship should establish closer links with the history of culture. This history would include an understanding of a text within its own epoch, but would recognize the semantic depths of language and genres that reach into the past

³ Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 21.

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Caryl Emerson, *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 8 (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁵ Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁶ Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, *Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies*, No. 38 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, trans. Vern W. McGee, *University of Texas Press Slavic Series*, No. 8 (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1986), ix, 1-9.

and project into the future. It is the role of literary critics to reveal those semantic meanings often concealed within the time and space of a text's own epoch.

He commented on the importance of boundaries: "In our enthusiasm for specification we have ignored questions of the interconnections and interdependence of various areas of culture....the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity."⁸ He, thus, argued for an openness to a text, with interpreters always standing outside in dialogue with the text to discern its meaning. Consistent with an Einsteinian understanding of reality, one's positioning with respect to a text shapes the meaning perceived. And since multiple stances are possible, an utterance – or text – can carry multiple meanings. A text can be polyphonic.

Among his observations on concealed meaning was the comment, "Semantic phenomena can exist in concealed form, potentially, and be revealed only in semantic cultural contexts of subsequent epochs that are favorable for such disclosure."⁹ I would argue that we are in such a favorable cultural context with the current moves toward what we are labeling postmodern. Particularly important, drawing the reader in as a significant component to interpretation has enriched the process.

Understanding Voice

Barbara Green has raised an important question that must be asked whenever biblical scholars draw on insights from what may seem far afield: "...to what extent is it legitimate to appropriate his [Bakhtin's] ideas so rooted in nineteenth-century Russian novels for ancient Hebrew prose? It is obvious that the Deuteronomist is not Dostoevsky. What shared assumptions – and with what subsequent moves clearly articulated – may Bakhtin's sense of intensely dialogic reality illumine earlier texts?"¹⁰

A partial answer I would offer to that question is that without feeling it necessary to appropriate Bakhtin's thinking fully and then try to read the Bible as he would,¹¹ a much more consistent approach with his dialogic principle, would be the stance that Bakhtin can function with the biblical scholar – who also deals with texts – as a dialogue partner in active conversation about what a text is, how

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰ Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, 27.

¹¹ Bakhtin was a Russian Orthodox Christian and did not apply his insights on Dostoevsky to his reading of the Bible.

meaning is derived, etc. And it is an open and ongoing conversation. From that perspective, some of the concepts I find useful in Bakhtin include the following.

Focus on the Reader of Texts. — If we shift our attention from object to subject, from text to the reader of texts, Bakhtin offers us a strategy of reading that enables us to see data in a different way. Bakhtin, whose doctoral dissertation produced an important book on Dostoevsky, was self-consciously aware that he was living after Einstein and shared Dostoevsky's understanding of reality: "It is as if varying systems of calculation were united here in the complex unity of an Einsteinian universe (although the juxtaposition of Dostoevsky's world with Einstein's world is, of course, only an artistic comparison and not a scientific analogy)."¹² With this thought he described a central contribution of Dostoevsky's artistic creation, which Bakhtin called the polyphonic novel: that is, an artistic representation of Dostoevsky's visualization of reality as multi-leveled. The epoch itself was multi-voiced and Dostoevsky structured his novels in a way to capture these consciousnesses as simultaneous, coexisting, and interacting.

Our link with Bakhtin is similar to Bakhtin's link to Dostoevsky. The sociology of their epoch was experienced in a similar way. The following description of Dostoevsky by Bakhtin, could apply equally to Bakhtin himself.

The epoch itself made the polyphonic novel possible. *Subjectively* Dostoevsky participated in the contradictory multi-leveledness of his own time: he changed camps, moved from one to another, and in this respect the planes existing in objective social life were for him stages along the path of his own life, stages of his own spiritual evolution. This personal experience was profound, but Dostoevsky did not give it a direct monologic expression in his work. This experience only helped him to understand more deeply the extensive and well-developed contradictions which coexisted among people — among people, not among ideas in a single consciousness. Thus the objective contradictions of the epoch did determine Dostoevsky's creative work — although not at the level of some personal surmounting of contradictions in the history of his own spirit, but rather at the level of an objective visualization of contradictions as forces coexisting simultaneously (to be sure, this vision was deepened by personal experience).¹³

Just as we, in a post-Einsteinian world, can think in terms of energy fields as the underlying reality of our perceptions, so Bakhtin focused on the multi-

¹² Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

leveled consciousnesses in dialogic tension present in Dostoevsky's novels. He traced that capacity to visualize reality as polyphonic, to objective contradictions within his epoch. Bakhtin agreed with some of those who were seeing the onset of capitalism in a cultural environment of "an untouched multitude of diverse worlds and social groups which had not been weakened in their individual isolation"¹⁴ contributing to the cultural instability of the epoch, whereas in the West the process was more gradual.

What will be useful to our discussion of space is Bakhtin's claim that Dostoevsky saw and conceived his world in terms of space, not time: "This stubborn urge to see everything as coexisting, to perceive and show all things side by side and simultaneous, as if they existed in space and not in time, leads Dostoevsky to dramatize, in space, even internal contradictions and internal stages in the development of a single person...."¹⁵ A recurring question for the biblical interpreter is what is the relationship between the narrative space created by the artist, and the social world space of that artist and ancient and modern readers of those texts? Because Dostoevsky saw his world as made up of multi-leveled consciousnesses, and Bakhtin saw that Dostoevsky saw in that manner, Bakhtin could claim "his perception in the cross-section of a given moment...permitted him to see many and varied things where others saw one and the same thing."¹⁶ Among other things, it permitted Dostoevsky to create the polyphonic novel. For us, it gives us a point of entry to understand why Levi and Levite means different things in different parts of the Bible.

I would argue that Levites, with their connection to priestly circles, were participants in the creation of ancient Israel's sacred stories.¹⁷ As keepers of sacred stories and sacred places, they would be among the support groups ultimately responsible for the received canon. It is conceivable that those whom scholars have labeled redactors of earlier material were working with a concept of canon—that is, collections of sacred stories—that was open to a plurality of voices. If the very concept of sacred canon was not to create a monologic work, especially given the competing interpretive communities in ancient Israel's culture itself, Bakhtin's proposals on a polyphonic reading of Dostoevsky could enrich our understanding of the received Bible's collection of texts. This provides a much richer reading context for the diversity of material found in the Bible. And it also provides a richer context for understanding the plurality of materials emerging from the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi library, a time when issues of canon were being debated.

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷ William R. Millar, *Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

Reading Texts.— To read a polyphonic text requires a discipline on the part of the reader. It requires of the reader the capacity to see from within a narrative space, rather than from outside. When building a picture of a character internal to the narrative, the reader must let go of seeking to hear the monologic voice of the author in the text. Bakhtin makes a sustained point about how a primary difference between what he calls a monologic work and a polyphonic creation is that with the former the author has reduced the object of his study into the plane of his perception. Characters are finalized; they are a product of the author's voice. All levels of the narrative are extensions of the author's consciousness. This presupposes that the author can stand outside his creation. The thought is "impelled toward a well-rounded, finalized, systemically monologic whole."¹⁸

Reading a polyphonic work, however, requires that we the reader let go of that need to discern meaning from a single plane of perception, but rather, enter into a world of multi-voiced consciousnesses. "Dostoevsky's world is the artistically organized coexistence and interaction of spiritual diversity, not stages in the evolution of a unified spirit."¹⁹ It was assumed that such an environment is much more capable of revealing human consciousness at its deepest levels. The goal of perception is to lift to consciousness the prior process of creating thought forms as they interact with other consciousnesses. One enters into the arena of dialogic imagination which captures more fully the human reality of being internal to experience. One "lives a tense life on the borders of someone else's thought, someone else's consciousness. It is oriented toward an event in its own special way and is inseparable from a person."²⁰

It could be said that Dostoevsky offers, in artistic form, something like a sociology of consciousnesses — to be sure, only on the level of coexistence. But even so, Dostoevsky as an artist does arrive at an *objective* mode of visualizing the life of consciousnesses and the forms of their living coexistence, and thus offers material that is valuable for the sociologist as well.²¹

The role of the author — or, we could add, a redactor giving shape to a canon of sacred writings — is to create a narrative context which allows the characters, as distinct voices, to retain control of their final word. The author's/redactor's voice recedes as he "...creates around the hero that extremely complex and subtle atmosphere that would force him to reveal and explain himself dialogically, to catch aspects of himself in others' consciousnesses, to build loopholes for himself, prolonging and thereby laying bare his own final

¹⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*

word as it interacts intensely with other consciousnesses."²² The truth of the narrative is the truth of the hero's own consciousness. "The issue here is not an absence of, but a radical change in, the author's position,..."²³ The perception seeking artistic expression is the perception of the polyphonic nature of life itself. It is this deeper level of dialogic interaction among a social world's consciousnesses that Bakhtin calls the great dialogue the polyphonic novel seeks to recreate.

What happens when a reader makes an effort to move perception from outside to inside a narrative? The single focus on an author's monologic plane of consciousness disappears. The author's job is to structure the narrative in such a way as to call forth from the characters themselves their consciousness of the world and their perception of self. This means that ultimate truth is no longer finalizable. Characters retain control of their final word. The reader must adjust to an awareness that perception is multiple. The reader seeks to perceive a narrative structure that affirms the principle of polyphony. Just as we see the world from our center of perception, so does everyone else see the world oriented from their center of perception. In the spirit of Einstein, "It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses."²⁴

Narrative Space and Social Space.—Narrative space and social space are linked. "A poetics cannot, of course, be divorced from social and historical analyses, but neither can it be dissolved in them."²⁵ If communication is to happen, the author creates an artistic form wherein the reader interacts with another consciousness. "Artistic form, correctly understood, does not shape already prepared and found content, but rather permits content to be found and seen for the first time."²⁶

Dostoevsky possessed an extraordinary gift for hearing the dialogue of his epoch, or, more precisely, for hearing his epoch as a great dialogue, for detecting in it not only individual voices, but precisely and predominantly the dialogic relationship among voices, their dialogic *interaction*. He heard both the loud, recognized, reigning voices of the epoch, that is, the reigning dominant ideas (official and unofficial), as well as voices still weak, ideas not yet fully emerged, latent ideas heard as yet

²² Ibid., 54.

²³ Ibid., 67.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁶ Ibid., 43.

by no one but himself, and ideas that were just beginning to ripen, embryos of future worldview. "Reality in its entirety," Dostoevsky himself wrote, "is not to be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still *latent, unuttered future Word*."²⁷

It is within the artistic form created by the author that narrative space and social space interact. Each needs the other. It is here that Claudia Camp's assertion can make sense. "Spatial analysis that brings narrative to bear can, in other words, provide a window, precisely through literature, into the ancient world. Critical spatiality theory provides, then one tool with which to theorize in turn the use of narrative texts in social-historical reconstruction."²⁸

The Chronotope. — Bakhtin created a special word to affirm that space and time, in the Einstein sense, are two different perspectives on the same underlying reality. He combined the word *chronos* (time) and *topos* (place/space) to produce the word *chronotope*.

We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the *chronotope* as a formally constitutive category of literature;...²⁹

An author's ability to visualize an event and recreate it artistically is born and shaped by the author's consciousness rooted in his own space-time. And yet, the artistic representation is still a product of the author's creativity, separate from the environment of the author's consciousness. "The represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be *chronotopically* identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary work is to be found."³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 90.

²⁸ Camp, "Storied Space, or, Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," 68.

²⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, *University of Texas Press Slavic Series*, No. 1 (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

³⁰ Ibid., 256.

As long as the organism lives, it resists a fusion with the environment, but if it is torn out of its environment, it dies. The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers.³¹

There is thus data relevant to the historian and the sociologist in a narrative text; but those data do not fuse with their historical or sociological ground. The chronotope makes the artistic visualization possible. The reader, however, must be disciplined in the reading of a text:

...we must never confuse – as has been done up to now and as is still often done – the *represented* world with the world outside the text (naive realism), nor must we confuse the author-creator of a work with the author as a human being (naive biographism), nor confuse the listener or reader of multiple and varied periods, recreating and renewing the text, with the passive listener or reader of one's own time (which leads to dogmatism in interpretation and evaluation).³²

The reader is part of the world that the text touches and thus contributes to the meaning that is created by a text. "...we may call this world the world that *creates* the text, for all its aspects – the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, the performers of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text – participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text."³³ The listener-reader is also part of a chronotopic setting who by reading renews the work, thereby contributing to its meaning.

What do we the reader bring to the enterprise of biblical interpretation? – Summarizing some of the points made above, can we list, then, insights from the presentation of Bakhtin that would be helpful for the biblical interpreter? 1) One theme that consistently recurs is the claim that the reader does not stand objectively outside a text; we the reader are part of the data being observed. We come already equipped, as it were, with a set of lenses that are rooted in the time and space of our own setting. To be sure, we are still to work at disciplining our seeing when we engage a text, but we can never arrive at that point when we can claim we have finally, and with complete objectivity, discovered a text's meaning.

³¹ Ibid., 254.

³² Ibid., 253.

³³ Ibid.

2) That need not be a source of despair, however, because that opens up the option of reconsidering what is the fundamental dynamic of reality. Since each person sees the world from the perspective of his/her own center, it is inevitable that our claims about reality are going to be diverse. Reality does not reduce itself to one plane of consciousness; perception will always be multiple and non-finalizable. Each of us can claim our own final word; but we are closer to the way knowledge is formulated by entering into the dialogic imagination required of those who would seek knowledge. Polyphonic texts are a possibility, as are monologic claims. But given the affirmations about how reality works, it is the greater complexity of polyphony that brings us closer to what we seek.

3) An utterance can be polyphonic, that is, it can be multi-voiced. It is the utterance, not the sentence, that is the fundamental unit of communication for Bakhtin. The utterance is more inclusive than the sentence. It can include an action. An utterance can include an entire text. It can bring voice to Thirdspace. Depending on where the reader is positioned, an utterance can carry different meanings. Thus, the simultaneity of difference is part of Bakhtin's perception of reality; and the challenge is to find a way to talk about that difference. Here one can discern the impact of Einstein.

4) The novel, or prose, is an ideal genre or form within which to construct polyphonic meaning. He sees in Dostoevsky an author who intentionally created a narrative context for polyphonic dialogue of consciousnesses. This is a useful concept for the biblical scholar looking for alternative options to explain what may look on the surface like discrepancies in a text. Traditional source criticism has often been taken to task for not taking the final form of the text seriously enough, and sometimes prematurely turning to the proposal of multiple sources. Polzin has explored the option of polyphony for the Deuteronomistic history. At the very least, the insight reminds us how rich story can be as a mode of discourse that allows one to convey the multi-dimensionality of an event.

5) Voloshinov – and there is a debate as to whether his writing is really a work by Bakhtin – with his discussion of reporting and reported speech,³⁴ along with Boris Uspensky's discussion of planes of perception described in his book, *Poetics of Composition*,³⁵ both identify literary devices used to shift perspective within story. It was this insight that first caught my attention. The Bible is filled with instances of a narrator's reporting speech – the surface plane of perception – and then a shift to reported speech, or speech within speech – which

³⁴ V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 115-23.

³⁵ Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1973).

moves the reader to a new perspective, or plane of perception, in the narrative. It is that capacity to shift perspective, or planes of perception, that allows the storyteller and the reader to move around in the narrative, including movement, I would argue, among Soja's First, Second, and Third Space. It contributes to Bakhtin's concept of an open text. Within an open text, voice movement is still possible. When that movement ceases, the text becomes closed and potentially oppressive.

6) The concept of planes of perception rooted in our respective consciousnesses led Bakhtin to describe the thinking process as managing orientations. "[The]... entire material unfolds before him [Dostoevsky] as a series of human orientations. His path leads not from idea to idea, but from orientation to orientation. To think, for him, means to question and to listen, to try out orientations, to combine some and expose others. For it must be emphasized that in Dostoevsky's world even *agreement* retains its *dialogic* character, that is, it never leads to a *merging* of voices and truths in a single *impersonal* truth, as occurs in the monologic world."³⁶

Understanding Space

Levitical History within the History of Israel. – Any discussion of Levi and the Levites of necessity is embedded within the larger context of the history of Israel. Keith Whitlam very effectively illustrates the link between our reconstructions of Israel's past to our perceptions shaped by "worldly/political" experience of the present. In other words, we the observer are internal to the process. Of the three major models currently in play to understand Israel's origins – namely, the Alt, Noth, Weippert gradual immigration/settlement model; the Albright, Wright, Bright presentation of the conquest model; and the Mendenhall, Gottwald internal revolt model – each reflect the scholar's perception of the region's present.

Alt's work is set in one of the most crucial periods of modern Palestinian history [1925]: a period of increasing Zionist immigration into the area in the early decades of the century, along with aspirations of a national homeland, which completely changed the social, political, and demographic characteristics of the region (see Abu-Lughob 1987; Khalidi 1984). The central feature of Alt's construction, significant immigration of groups in search of a national homeland, needs to be considered in the context of these dramatic developments in Palestine at the time he was

³⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 95.

conducting his research – developments of which he could hardly have been ignorant....³⁷

Albright's philosophy of history, which is critical for understanding his perception of ancient Israel, was produced in 1940 and revised and reprinted three times....Albright's description is remarkably reminiscent of the demographic distinction following the Zionist influx into Palestine with the indigenous Jewish population being assimilated ('coalesced') while the indigenous Palestine population were absorbed 'by treaty, conquest, or gradual absorption'....³⁸

His [Mendenhall's] questioning of the domain assumption that the origins of Israel in Palestine were the result of a significant external influx of a new population appears to value the importance of indigenous culture and history in way that had not previously been recognized. However, his emphasis upon the centrality of the new religion, brought from outside, immediately stifled any possibility of a new departure in the study of the history of the region....Mendenhall's radical distinction between the Israelite religious community and the corrupt socio-political regimes indigenous to Palestine continues to mirror the common representation of the modern state of Israel as a radically new development in the region, with its roots in European civilization and democracy, which has been able to transform the land so long neglected by a divided and indolent indigenous population....It is striking that given the expressly political nature of Gottwald's work, his Marxist-materialist analysis of history and explicit acknowledgement of his part in the anti-Vietnam movement, he never mentions the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination.³⁹

I suspect that Whitelam would acknowledge that his quest for a history of Palestine that would give voice, as well, to the indigenous population of Palestine, silenced by the dominant quest for a history of Israel, is also shaped by his perception of political tensions in modern day Palestine. It is the claim to complete objectivity, and so-called neutral identification of the facts, often at work in established biblical discourse, that is being challenged. The result has been the multiple inventions of a dominant ancient Israel “colonizing” past time and effectively silencing a modern Palestinian voice, that is at issue. A Palestinian discourse that is a partner in the conversation about the region has been marginalized to Soja's Thirdspace and rendered invisible.

³⁷ Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The silencing of Palestinian history* (London: Routledge, 1996), 76.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103, 06, 09.

Flanagan's Hologram.—With the recent and dramatic acceleration of electronic means of communication, new ways of thinking about space have emerged. Not only can virtual space be conceived, but technology like holography can allow us actually to perceive three-dimensional images on a two-dimensional plate. Jim Flanagan has made very good use of the hologram as a methodological metaphor for moving us to think differently about space and to build imagined reconstructions of biblical figures like David. Even the strange looking metal plate on the surface of Flanagan's book, *David's Social Drama*,⁴⁰ demonstrates the complex make-up of space. The reader soon learns it is not a mirror, reflecting one's own views in its content, nor is it a photograph, conveying a one-to-one correspondence to a content. It is only after inadvertently looking at the plate held at a certain angle, that the reader discovers it is a hologram of Michelangelo's David. The holographic image appears in a "space" but our usual categories for understanding space or seeing do not apply.

Flanagan successfully moves the discussion of studying Iron Age data from what he calls a space-time systemics—in the Cartesian sense, not to be understood in an Einstein sense—that organizes archaeological and textual data on a grid, as it were, and then reconstructs geographical spatial images and compares the results with what came before and after. To use Bakhtin's language that procedure is akin to reducing the data to one's monologic plane of consciousness or perception. And often, in the spirit of modernism, as one gathers data toward a convergence, one begins to make the claim that one has the "facts."

A hologram results from the interference of multiple planes of perception yielding an image to an observer, the image never completely finalized, as in a photograph. Such a methodological approach works well when reconstructing the meaning of the explicate data of text and tell of a segmented social system. Flanagan's research on David sets up a helpful way to approach an understanding of the Levites. In a 1972 paper on the Court History,⁴¹ Flanagan distinguished between an earlier narrative source whose purpose was to legitimate David and his dynasty, or house, within the fluid dynamics of a segmented social system. Material from that Court History was later rescripted to meet the needs of the Succession Document legitimizing the rise to power of Solomon. The narrative thus encodes multiple planes of perception reflecting the fluid shifts in the social system.

⁴⁰ James W. Flanagan, *David's Social Drama: A Hologram of Israel's Early Iron Age*, ed. James W. Flanagan, *The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series 7* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).

⁴¹ James W. Flanagan, "Court History or Succession Document? A Study of 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 2 (1972): 172-81.

In a move that further illustrates Whitelam's point about how scholarship draws on models shaped by present events in the region, Flanagan calls attention to the strong analogy to what he proposes for a reading of David, in the rise to power of Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud in Saudi Arabia, whose story is told by Sheik Almana.⁴² That choice also reflects another of Whitelam's concerns that we move more consciously to take seriously indigenous populations of the region, to understand its history. Flanagan includes in his book, a very helpful appendix that records some of the conversation between Ibn Saud and western leaders, like Franklin D. Roosevelt, on the Palestinian question.⁴³

In that same spirit, drawing on Sheik Almana's narrative about Ibn Saud, of particular interest to us for our interest in the Levites, is Almana's description of the role of the Ikhwan or Brotherhood who embodied the ideology of the Wahhabism, a form of Islam that affirms as true only those ideas and actions found in the Qur'an.

For the moment it need only be said that within a year of the birth of the Ikhwan [Brotherhood] Ibn Saud found himself with a large, ferocious and powerful army of men who regarded him as God's chosen instrument and could be relied upon to remain loyal and rally round him whenever he gave the call to arms.⁴⁴

One of Ibn Saud's strategies was to create settlements around sources of water in an attempt to reign in the fierce independence of the nomadic bedouin, "creating settlements around the oases in his kingdom where the bedouin would be able to cease their nomadic ways and grow regular crops."⁴⁵ And then in a role not unlike a role some propose for the Levites, teachers of Wahhabism were sent to teach correct doctrine to the various settlements.

In the settlements Ibn Saud hoped to cultivate the Wahhabi faith so that the settlers would be bound to him, not only in a common desire for peace, but also in a common religious creed....Religious leaders, known as *ulemas*, were appointed to each settlement and instructed the inhabitants in the Wahhabi faith with such success that the Ikhwan soon became renowned for their religious fanaticism....They also had a military purpose, for Ibn Saud now possessed for the first time a reserve of men whose whereabouts were known, and whose loyalty could be relied

⁴² Mohammed Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud*, Revised ed. (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1982).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 275-310. See also Flanagan, *David's Social Drama*, 339-40.

⁴⁴ Almana, *Arabia Unified*, 55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

upon.⁴⁶

Ibn Saud in time came into conflict with the Ikhwan and their agenda as he worked toward the building of what would become a monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula. Still, the social world analogy is helpful in preparing us to see a fluidity in the history of the Levites as that social group lived out its changing status in a segmented cultural environment. As we will see, there are times when the Levites are presented in a military role, other times in a teaching capacity, other times in a hierarchically organized-by-family, priestly role. It is also my claim that it was the Levitical priestly families who were key elements of a support group for significant portions of the biblical sacred stories.

Narrative Space and Social Space. — At the November 2002 meeting of the Constructions of Ancient Space seminar, Claudia Camp offered an important paper applying critical space categories to the interpretation of portions of Ben Sira. Her discussion of the narrative relationship between the priest Simeon and the ancestral figure of Aaron is particularly interesting for those of us seeking to apply spatial categories to the reading of Levitical genealogies and the use of that narrative strategy to the interpretation of relationships between priestly families in ancient Israel.

Camp, too, sees the strategic position the reader holds in the life of a text. Drawing on insights from Wesley Kort, she modifies the priority of Soja's Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace categories: "Narrative embodies a kind of Thirdspace within which concepts and percepts can be identified and analyzed, but which is also more than the sum of those two parts."⁴⁷ She argues that rather than simply assuming that canonical texts must reflect only ancient Secondspace concepts, narrative, like real life, creates a very complex mix of spatialities. In that mix is "the notion of the text 'creating a world', that is, a space in which the reader as well as the characters 'live.'"⁴⁸ Building on an insight proposed by Flanagan and Malina on the mapping of genealogical material, namely, that "people move through people," her discussion of Aaron and the list of names in Ben Sira, illustrates the principle that people also "...read through people." This opens up a way to understand how a believing community — by means of a text — can give shape to the sacred, that is, a space for Bible. Aaron, a figure occupying no space, in effect assumes all space.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 81-82. See also Gottwald's comment, "They [Levites] were an arm of the royal state useful for consolidating a far-flung kingdom by wedding the old Yahwistic confederate ideology to the Davidic state" Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 372.

⁴⁷ Camp, "Storied Space, or, Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In one sense, this language of expansive, indeed universal space that unites Abraham and Solomon seems precisely to exclude Aaron, whose extended description – the longest of any save Simeon – places him nowhere and indeed denies him a portion of space. In fact, however, one of the effects of totalizing discourse is that nowhere can easily become everywhere, and everywhere be condensed to a single point. Aaron, or Aaron cum Simeon, is the perfect union of the issue of Abraham's loins and Solomon's mouth. We need to consider Aaron's (no)space in this light. Though Aaron is denied a portion of space, he receives instead the Lord himself as "his portion and inheritance" (45.22). But the Lord is, at least in some sense, everywhere: "he is the all" (43.27). Thus does nowhere quickly take on a universal cast. Aaron's space is the space of holiness itself.⁴⁹

Understanding Power

By the time we get to Ben Sira, Aaron is clearly linked to priestly tradition. As Camp suggests, "Aaron's space is the space of holiness itself." To use Bakhtin's language, such a narrative takes on the attributes of a monologic system, "impelled toward a well-rounded, finalized, systemically monologic whole."⁵⁰ It produces a closed text defended by those who control Secondspace power. The text, however, may cover up and encode, a more complicated reality of silenced Thirdspace voices, certainly in the earlier pre-exilic history of the Levites with priestly families competing for control of the sacred stories and sacred places. The challenge before us is to examine whether or not a methodology that foregrounds spatial categories can reconstruct a more polyphonic dialogue reflected, if not in single texts, at least in the canonical collection.

In the Reader-Response chapter of the Bible and Culture Collective's book on *The Postmodern Bible*⁵¹ they identify three spatial worlds surrounding a text that impact the construction of meaning: "the world behind the text", "the world of the text", and the "world in front of the text." It is particularly the latter that has received insufficient attention in the construction of biblical discourse.

Whereas philological-historical criticism seeks out the "world behind the text" – the history of the text's production – its practitioners have often overlooked their own participation in the "world in front of the text" – the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 32.

⁵¹ The Bible and Culture Collective, "Reader-Response Criticism," in *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

history of the text's reception. One of the richest resources for reader-response criticism of the Bible are the disguised reading reports in the philological-historical commentaries that fill the shelves of our libraries....Philological-historical critics try to look behind the text, while formalist critics try to look inside it. Their eyes are focused to miss what is happening in front of the text – their own encounter with the text in the act of reading.⁵²

The kind of power we are talking about in this section is the Secondspace power of Soja that the scholar brings to the interpretive process. Whitlam has described how much the dominant western cultural biblical discourse of the twentieth century has been shaped by present day worldly involvement in issues centered in Middle Eastern politics. His discussion is focused primarily on the current models used to describe the origins of ancient Israel and how each has in effect colonized past time and silenced the larger Palestinian voice in the name of objective scholarship. The Bible and Culture Collective makes a similar observation.

Not only are the readings of nonspecialists excluded, but the voices of dissenting scholars within the guild [SBL] remain marginalized until they gravitate toward the discursive center by adopting both the generally accepted reading strategies and conclusions. Only then will they be given a serious hearing. The critiques of accepted readings by both nonspecialists and marginalized specialists, therefore, are excluded apriori by the preexisting historical-critical consensus.⁵³

To ignore the world we bring with us “in front of the text” is to “...mask the role played by power and politics in the adjudication of readings....”⁵⁴

These insights have implications for the methodological approach to a study of the history of Levi and the Levites. As indicated earlier such a study is embedded in the larger challenge of writing a history of ancient Israel. What complicates the process is that the quest for an understanding of the history of the Levites is a quest for the sacred. In the video by David Shipler based on his book, *Arab and Jew*,⁵⁵ one of his Israeli interviewees admits that religious fanaticism is much more dangerous than political fanaticism. If a settler in the West Bank, for instance, is there because the settler believes that this is land given by God, announced by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then there is no further

⁵² Ibid., 22, 24.

⁵³ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁵ David K. Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (New York: Times Books, 1986).

room for debate. The antiquity of priestly pronouncements will be protected in Secondspace discourse. And as Whitelam has shown, even scholarly discourse with a vested interest in the state of Israel, will rise to its defense. The current so-called “maximalist-minimalist” debate illustrates the level of passion that can sometimes color the discussion.

A desirable goal, drawing on insights from Bakhtin and Flanagan, would be to structure a discourse in such a way that a polyphonic conversation is constructed, one that affirms hypotheses as holograms – not “mirrors” or “photographs.” It is in that spirit that I offer the following approach to two central themes within Levi/Levite studies that have engaged biblical scholars during much of the twentieth century. My goal is to shift the perspective from an orientation that is “...impelled toward a well-rounded, finalized, systemically monologic whole”⁵⁶ to one that allows a non-finalizable dialogic imagination to lead the way. As with so many topics in biblical study, syntheses proposed by Wellhausen are convenient starting points.

Julius Wellhausen on Levi and Levites. – In 1878, Julius Wellhausen, with his *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*,⁵⁷ established the dominant paradigm within which much of the discussion by biblical scholars of Levi and Levites was formulated during the twentieth century. Wellhausen proposed that the Levi we meet in Genesis was on the same secular level as his brothers with “not the faintest idea of Levi’s sacred calling or of his dispersion as being conditioned thereby.”⁵⁸ The blood-thirsty character of Levi in Genesis 34 and his dispersion by Jacob in Genesis 49 “...is a curse and no blessing, an annihilation and no establishment of his special character.”⁵⁹

The dissolution of the tribe accounts for the occasional Levite we encounter in Judges, without land, seeking a place to live and hiring himself out for sacrificial functions. This latter opportunity came to them because Moses was a Levite, one of their number, predisposing them to sacred office. During this early period there were multiple sanctuaries with no one group claiming sole authority to the priesthood. Micah could offer the priestly role to his son (Judg 17:5) as could David (2 Sam 8:18).

With the building of the temple by Solomon the priestly family of Zadok rose to prominence superceding the family of Eli, a Levitical family claiming connection with Moses at the ancient sanctuaries of Shiloh and Dan. Wellhausen

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 32.

⁵⁷ Julius Wellhausen, "The Priests and the Levites," in *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1878; reprint, Meridian Books).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

saw the Zadokites as interlopers deriving their authority from David and Solomon, not from ancestral heroes like Moses or Aaron from the wilderness period.

It was not until the centralization of worship in Judah by Josiah which included the shutting down of all the high places of worship outside Jerusalem, that the name Levite was officially linked with priesthood. The writer of Deuteronomy wanted to establish the legal procedures to assure that the outlying Levitical priests would have economic support; indeed, that they could obtain work at the now central sanctuary at Jerusalem. This, of course, means that the book of Deuteronomy would have a Josianic date.

The prophet Ezekiel opposed that move vigorously. Ezekiel proposed that while the Levites could get work at the temple, they were clearly to be inferior positions, viewed as punishment from God for their previous idolatrous worship at the illegitimate sanctuaries at the high places. It was with Ezekiel that the term priest *and* Levite came into vogue.

The exile and restoration under the Persians provide the historical contexts for much of what we now read in the Priestly Code of the Pentateuch. There the categories of priest *and* Levite are assumed. Aaron has emerged as the ancestor from the wilderness period for the priesthood. "...[T]o bring the sons of Aaron into comparison with the sons of Zadok, as a proof of their high antiquity, is just as reasonable as to bring the tabernacle into comparison with the temple of Jerusalem for a similar purpose."⁶⁰ Wellhausen proposed a post-exilic date for the Priestly Code in spite of the fact that the narrative context is placed in the wilderness period. The implication is that the Priestly Code of the Torah tells us more about the beginning of Judaism in the Second Temple period than it tells us about the origins of ancient Israel in the Wilderness Period.

What is implied for a study of Levi and the Levites is that the secular tribe of Levi was dissolved long before the formation of the monarchy. And the Levites we meet in the Bible are a post-Josianic creation of a clerical order with no blood-ties with the tribe in antiquity. Just as prophets like Elijah and Elisha could form schools of disciples who took on the title of "sons of the prophet," so those called to the priestly role became "sons of Levi" because of the ancient association of Moses as a Levite. "...[Levi] takes a place of its own alongside of the tribes of the nation, is itself a tribe, constituted, however, not by blood, but by a community of spiritual interests."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ibid., 125.

⁶¹ Ibid., 136.

Cuthbert Lattey, writing in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* in 1950, gave expression to a view frequently encountered among readers of the Bible not comfortable with Wellhausen's kind of critical interpretation of biblical texts: "Wellhausen produces an account of the Old Testament utterly at variance with the Sacred Text itself."⁶² He challenged Wellhausen's reconstruction at a number of points. One of the lines of debate centered on what to do with Aaron; and a second point of controversy was the date of the Priestly materials, P.

The Date of P. — Taking up the latter first, considerable work by scholars like Yehezkel Kaufmann⁶³ and Menahem Haran⁶⁴ has been done to move at least portions of the Priestly Code to an earlier period. Menahem Haran argues for a pre-exilic date during the reign of Hezekiah. One line of debate, suggested by G. Ernest Wright, focused on whether the hierarchical juxtaposition of priest *and* Levite is earlier than Wellhausen's post-exilic dating.⁶⁵ Wright, influenced by von Rad, challenged the usual assumption that in Deuteronomy all Levites are priests, or at least qualified for altar jobs should they visit Jerusalem. He suggested there is already in pre-exilic Deuteronomy evidence that some Levites were altar priests, while other Levites served as teachers in a client role. These latter were among the more economically vulnerable ones linked in Deuteronomy with widows, orphans, and aliens. Abba joined the debate with papers on Deuteronomy and Ezekiel⁶⁶ and concluded,

If the existence of a separate order of Levites in pre-exilic times be admitted, it becomes apparent that the cultic personnel of the Priestly Code is that of the first temple and not an innovation of the Exile introduced at the return from Babylon.

If an early date for the Priestly Code be conceded, it must necessitate a complete re-evaluation of its evidence. At least it could no longer be maintained that the priestly writer has read back the organization of the second temple into earlier times. Indeed it may well

⁶² Cuthbert Lattey, "The Tribe of Levi," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 12 (July 1950): 277.

⁶³ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel, from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (New York: Schocken, 1972).

⁶⁴ Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985).

⁶⁵ G. Ernest Wright, "Levites in Deuteronomy," *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (July 1954): 324-30.

⁶⁶ See Emerton's response to Wright: John A. Emerton, "Priests and Levites in Deuteronomy: An Examination of Dr. G. E. Wright's Theory," *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (April 1962): 129-38. And then, see Abba's paper: Raymond Abba, "Priests and Levites in Deuteronomy," *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (July 1977): 257-67. He followed with a paper on Ezekiel: Raymond Abba, "Priests and Levites in Ezekiel," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (January 1978): 1-9.

be that the priestly source will prove to be of far greater historical value than we have hitherto been prepared to admit.⁶⁷

Richard Elliot Friedman in his book, *Who Wrote the Bible?*,⁶⁸ includes an argument that utilizes space in the Cartesian sense of a space and time grid as Flanagan has described. In my view this illustrates that there are times when space can be used in this more traditional way if one acknowledges the result as contained within a single line of perception.

Friedman summarizes Wellhausen's proposal that the Priestly tabernacle of the wilderness period was a "pious fraud", that is, it really reflected the dimensions and detail of the Second Temple of the Persian period, the date he, Wellhausen, offered for the Priestly Code. The tabernacle was an invention of the Priestly writer creating an antecedent structure to the temple. Friedman, called this claim a "brilliant mistake." After inviting the reader to count cubits and compare narrative descriptions of sacred structures, he concludes that the brilliant part of Wellhausen's claim was his link of the tabernacle to a temple. The mistake was that the measurements correspond to narrative descriptions of the First Temple, not the Second Temple as Wellhausen suggested. Friedman proposes that the narrative space describing the measurements for the Tabernacle fit into the space described beneath the extended wings of the Cherubim of the Holy of Holies. That space also compares, archaeologically, with the dimensions of a sanctuary excavated at Arad. He, then, listed those texts that describe the bringing of the tent and Ark to its resting place within the First Temple. Without claiming that we have an untouched-up "photograph," this suggests, that the tabernacle of the Priestly source was real and did have a history; it was not the pure invention of a "pious fraud." Friedman joins those who affirm an early edition of P dated to the reign of Hezekiah. He also shares Frank Moore Cross's view that the elaborateness of the tent described for the wilderness period was shaped by the tent of David's time, when it had become relatively stationary.

Aaron. – Moving to the debate over what to do with Aaron, I find Cross's programmatic essay on the conflict narratives of the wilderness period and his insight into their link with early priestly families, one that allows for constructing a social setting for a polyphonic dialogue in pre-exilic Israel.⁶⁹ Cross writes from the disciplinary orientation of an historian of religion. His primary focus is one that engages the "world behind the text" and the "world of the text." Using the

⁶⁷ Abba, "Priests and Levites in Ezekiel," 8-9.

⁶⁸ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

⁶⁹ Frank Moore Cross, "The Priestly Houses of Early Israel," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 195-215.

organizing principle of typology, he presents material as a positivist. As such his focus is not on the "world in front of the text" that some postmodern scholars recommend we bring to the enterprise of interpretation. Still, as an historian of religion, he does present data that can be useful in drawing out the skills of dialogic imagination. "There is evidence in Israel's earliest traditions that has never been sufficiently utilized which bears upon the history of the early priestly houses of Israel, namely, the stories of conflict in the wilderness."⁷⁰ These stories include the calf narrative of Exodus 32; Aaron and Miriam challenging the authority of Moses in Numbers 12; the Korah rebellion and the like.

In our sketch of the stories of conflict we have asked the following questions: (1) How were the traditions of the priest of Midian and Moses' Midianite connections preserved? Where did they have a cultic or social function? (2) Why is it that Moses is portrayed as in perpetual conflict with Aaron and related clans? What is the primitive function of these tales? (3) How is it that Moses dominates the earliest traditions heroically, Aaron playing at most a negative role, but in later levels of tradition Aaron takes an increasingly important part, ending as Moses' alter ego in Priestly tradition?

All these questions receive answers if we posit an ancient and prolonged strife between priestly houses: the Mushite priesthood which flourished at the sanctuaries of Shiloh and Dan and an allied Mushite-Kenite priesthood of the local shrines at 'Arad and Kadesh opposed to the Aaronite priesthood of Bethel and Jerusalem.⁷¹

For our purposes, one illustration will suffice to suggest that this perspective opens a door to a productive use of dialogic imagination to understand the narrative stories of Levi and Levites encoding, as does a hologram, multiple planes of perception characteristic of a segmented social order. Cross notes that Wellhausen and especially Kurt Möhlenbrink⁷² recognized the importance and antiquity of a segmented genealogical fragment of the tribe of Levi that does not follow the form of other Levitical genealogies found in the Bible:

Fortunately, the fragment of a second genealogy has survived in Numbers 26:58a. Its importance and antiquity was recognized by Wellhausen and strongly emphasized by Möhlenbrink. The original form of the list seems to have read: "These are the clans of Levi: the clan of the Libnites, the clan

⁷⁰ Ibid., 201.

⁷¹ Ibid., 205-06.

⁷² Kurt Möhlenbrink, "Die Levitischen Überlieferungen Des Alten Testaments," ZAW 11 (1934): 184-231.

of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mushites, and the clan of the Korahites (*Qorhi*)."⁷³

Libnah and Hebron appear in lists of Levitical cities. The name Mushite affirms the importance of Moses; but it is unusual that the name of Aaron does not appear in the list. "Most curious is the failure to mention the clan of the descendants of Aaron. The natural explanation is that the Aaronids originally were reckoned as Hebronites, but that this datum was suppressed in favor of the official genealogy."⁷⁴

Add to this the information that several of the Levitical genealogical lists identify Gershom, a name shared by Moses' son, as the first of three names in the line sequence following Levi [Gershom/n, Kohath, Merari; Exod 6:16]; whereas in other genealogies Kohath, a name usually linked with Aaron takes over first place, while Gershom appears to have been moved to last place [Kohath, Merari, Gershom/n; 2 Chron 29:12]. This kind of fluidity in genealogical listing is consistent with what one would expect in shifts of power, as the relative status of various Levitical families moved, in the political reality of a segmented social system.⁷⁵ Ibn Saud's dealings with the Ikhwan Brotherhood would be a more recent parallel. As suggested above, readers "...read through people" constructing a space for voice and power, or as Camp puts it, "a space for Bible."

Cross summarizes: "David's unusual choice of two chief priests, like many of his decisions relating to Israel's new central sanctuary in Jerusalem, was based on sure diplomatic grounds; he chose a priest from each of the great, rival priestly families: Abiathar of the Shilonite house of Eli which claimed decent from Moses, Zadok from the Hebronite clan which traced its line to Aaron."⁷⁶ The political and social environment in the move from David to Solomon, which included the firing of Abiathar and elevation of Zadok to the position of sole high priest would be enough to embed in the narrative tradition the tension between perceived Second and Third space events.⁷⁷

Returning to an insight from Bakhtin about Dostoevsky: "Dostoevsky possessed an extraordinary gift for hearing the dialogue of his epoch, or, more precisely, for hearing his epoch as a great dialogue, for detecting in it not only individual voices, but precisely and predominantly the dialogic relationship among voices, their dialogic *interaction*. He heard both the loud, recognized,

⁷³ Cross, "The Priestly Houses of Early Israel."

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ See Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁷⁶ Cross, "The Priestly Houses of Early Israel," 215.

⁷⁷ See Millar, *Priesthood in Ancient Israel*, 9-62.

reigning voices of the epoch, that is, the reigning dominant ideas (official and unofficial), as well as voices still weak, ideas not yet fully emerged, latent ideas heard as yet by no one but himself, and ideas that were just beginning to ripen, embryos of future worldview."⁷⁸

What critical spatiality theory is providing for the reader of the Bible is a heightened sensitivity to the cultural complexity of lived space. Among the challenges are to name those who control Secondspace power, rooted as they are in a lived space, and to be on the lookout for those silenced Thirdspace voices, both ancient and modern, that are nonetheless very much alive and seeking expression. It may be that sometimes we must wait. "Semantic phenomena can exist in concealed form, potentially, and be revealed only in semantic cultural contexts of subsequent epochs that are favorable for such disclosure."⁷⁹ The political and social environment facing Abraham's children today is but one place calling for those who would trust dialogic imagination to lead the way.

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⁷⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 90.

⁷⁹ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 5.

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