THE URBAN WORLD AND THE FIRST CHRISTIANS
Repairing Social Vertigo

Spatial Production and Belonging in 1 Peter

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In his most recent collection of poems, The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion, Kei Miller stages an intriguing conflict between two voices who represent two different systems of knowledge, two ways of understanding space, place, and territory. The figure known as “the cartographer” takes an empirical approach to space, seeking to capture it in lines and measurements in order to comprehend it. His work lies at the service of dispassionate, objective knowledge:

What I do is science. I show
the earth as it is, without bias.
I never fall in love. I never get involved
with the muddy affairs of land.

Too much passion unsteadies the hand.
I aim to show the full
of a place in just a glance.¹

He is challenged, however, by “the rastaman,” who resides in the very land the cartographer attempts to map. The rastaman rejects the cartographer’s technical methods as reductionistic, and advocates instead the path of intimate experience and memory:

Him [The cartographer’s] work is to make thin and crushable all that is big and as real as ourselves; is to make flat all that is high and rolling; is to make invisible and wutliss plenty things that poor people cyaa do without—like board houses, and the corner shop from which Miss Katie sell her famous peanut porridge.²

Throughout Miller’s book, the cartographer and the rastaman engage in a back-and-forth, each contesting the other’s approach to space and knowledge of places.

Since what has been termed “the spatial turn” in the social sciences and humanities, it is no longer possible to speak of space simply as an objective grid of reality that we can measure and thus pin down, or a bounded area in which things happen. The rastaman’s critique of the cartographer’s approach finds theoretical expression in the work of scholars such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Doreen Massey, and David Harvey, among others.³ These thinkers have challenged what had been, for so long, taken for granted—namely, the objective facticity and “given-ness” of space as something that “simply is.” They have instead underscored its constructed and symbolic nature, drawing our attention to the diverse ways in which space is experienced, conceived, and imagined in human practice. It can no longer be thought of as the passive stage on which our activities take place; rather, it is transformed into a dynamic element of social life itself—caught up in, forming, and being formed by our interactions with one another.

The cumulative force of this new phase of investigation, of analyzing space, has not only compelled various disciplines to leave behind the notion of space as a fixed or stable “container” in favor of far more fluid, dynamic views, but has also given rise to multiple interrogations of the “hidden ter-

². Miller, Cartographer, 17.
rains of ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle”⁴ that in fact operate beneath what were once thought to be commonsensical or “plain” understandings of space. Space emerges as an arena of contest for different ways of thinking and living, shaped and reshaped both by power and responses to power within the complex web of human relations.

These contests of spatial imagination are of pivotal importance because symbolic orderings of space form an essential part of how we interpret the world and move in that world. The French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that the ways in which a particular group of people thinks of space “structures not only the group’s representation of the world but the group itself, which orders itself in accordance with this representation.”⁵ Constructions of space (as well as time) are thus not merely inert ways of thinking about the world, but are in fact embedded in specific patterns of behavior and practices and, as such, constitutive of a community’s social and political life.

The implications of these developments for the study of Christian origins are not difficult to see, concerned as the discipline is with the beliefs and practices of the earliest Christian communities. Indeed, several recent studies have begun to approach New Testament texts with keen attention to spatial questions.⁶ In conjunction with its predecessors in this regard, the present essay brings the renewed perspectives on space to 1 Peter. In what follows, I will consider one aspect of the letter’s spatial imagination, placing it alongside a contemporaneous but far more dominant form of spatial representation—that of first-century Roman imperialism. To allow for a comparative study, I take 1 Peter as an example of an early Christian approach to space (though it was likely one among several), and the practices of the imperial cults as representative of the spatial agenda of Rome. In particular, I argue that the author of 1 Peter scrambled the Roman construction of space to create room for a new way of social—and spatial—belonging that lay at the heart of emerging Christianity.

⁴. Harvey, Condition, 205.
1. The Imperial Cults and Imperial Reconfigurations of Space

a. Transformations in the Augustan Era and After

By the time of the spread of Christianity in the first century CE, the cultic veneration of rulers was already a well-established practice among the Hellenized communities of Asia Minor. Ruler cults in the region date to as early as the fifth century BCE. Alexander the Great already received cultic veneration in his lifetime, as did his Seleucid successor Antiochus III and his queen Laodice. As Roman presence in the Greek world increased throughout the second century BCE, there emerged corresponding cults to Roman power. At Chios, for example, we find a cult to the goddess Roma, marked by a procession, sacrifice and games. Elsewhere in the Hellenistic world there emerged cults collectively dedicated to “the Hearth of the Romans,” “the People of the Romans,” “the universal Roman benefactors,” and even individual Roman officials.

The rule of Augustus marked a watershed moment not only for the Roman Empire but also the evolution of Anatolian ruler cults. By 29 BCE, he had already granted sanctuaries to Roma and Julius Caesar at Nicaea and Ephesus, and was himself the recipient of divine honors at Pergamum and Nicomedia. In 27 BCE, upon his taking the name Sebastos (the Greek equivalent of “Augustus”), the number of temples and sacrifices in his honor escalated, accompanied by a proliferation of cults to his successors and other members of the imperial family in subsequent years. Within only one year after Augustus took the title Sebastos in 27 BCE, as the epigraphic evidence shows, there was erected in Ephesus a statue of the Sebastos along with a sacred precinct (temenos), and the city of Philadelphia in Lydia had already consecrated a priest dedicated to the cult of Roma and Augustus. A contemporary of Augustus, Nicolaus of Damascus, reporting from the eastern part of the empire, could thus say:

Because men call him by this name as a mark of esteem for his honor, they revere him with temples and sacrifices, organized by islands and continents, and as cities and provinces they match the greatness of his virtue and the scale of his benefactions toward them.12

Priests of the cult to Augustus are attested to in thirty-four cities in Asia Minor—“doubtless,” Stephen Mitchell writes, “only a fraction of the original total.”13

This spread of cultic veneration of the Roman emperor and his family inaugurated a series of crucial transformations of the urban landscape of various Anatolian cities. These transformations reflected a new imperial geography in which the known world was centered around Rome, as can be evidenced in several architectural practices in urban Anatolia.

Consistently, imperial temples and sanctuaries were built in the most prominent and prestigious locations in a city, thus emphasizing the looming and pervasive presence of Rome over the lives of the city’s inhabitants and those of its dependents. At Eresos, a benefactor built an imperial temple and sanctuary (naos) in the most prominent part of the city’s main square and another in the commercial harbor “so that no place should lack mark of his [the benefactor’s] goodwill and piety toward the god [Augustus].”14 Likewise, a temple to the Theoi Soteres Sebastoi at Sidyma, dating to the Claudian era, was built in the center, and in Cestrus two imperial temples faced each other across the main square.15 The Caesareum at Laertes faced the city’s main gates,16 and in Stratonicea, the temple to the Sebastoi Autokratores was given prominence on a terrace above the local theater.17

In some instances, centrality of location could not be accomplished due to existing structures. The solution was to achieve visibility by other means. This was the case with Iotape, where the city center was already crammed into one arm of the bay. The Trajanic temple was, consequently, built on the opposite arm of the bay, so that it remained clearly visible from the city center.18 Visibility also appeared to be a key criterion in Pergamum, where a massive substructure had to be engineered so that a temple jointly

12. FGtr 90 F. 125.1, quoted and translated in Mitchell, Anatolia, 1:100.
17. Price, Rituals and Power, 137, 262.
consecrated to Trajan and Zeus Philios could occupy the highest point of the acropolis. (Although the location of the Pergamene provincial temple to Roma and Augustus, the first of its kind in the province of Asia, has not been determined, it may well have been located in the city center.) The imperial temple of Ankara achieved visual prominence via its location on a hill on the west bank of the river that divided the Roman city. It thus towered over buildings such as the bath-gymnasium complex and the theater, communicating imperial protection over the city’s civic life. The Ephesian temple to the Sebastoi was likewise built to visually impress. Built on an artificially terraced slope of Mount Koressos, it had for its facade a looming three-story stoa that overlooked the open plaza, which in turn allowed the viewer to experience the full impact of the facade. In clear view of anyone approaching it from the city below, this imposing structure vividly communicated to the people of Ephesus the elevated, all-embracing presence and patronage of the emperor. In Pisidian Antioch, the Augusteum departed from the custom of east-facing sanctuaries, built to face west on the city’s eastern acropolis so that its awe-inspiring facade and propylon were plainly visible to the inhabitants below.

b. An Empire State of Mind: Domination and Imperial Geography

The central locations and high visibility of these imperial buildings were by no means innocent criteria. Rather, they were key elements in the visual grammar of domination conveyed by Rome to its Anatolian subjects. Mitchell rightly observes that:

. . . imperial buildings literally took over and dominated the urban landscape, thus symbolizing unequivocally the central position that emperor

21. Friesen, Imperial Cults, 50–52.
22. Benjamin B. Rubin, “(Re)presenting Empire: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, 31 BC–AD 68” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 59. Rubin does note that the tradition of east-facing temples is not rigidly observed in Anatolia. He cites the examples of the imperial temples in Ankara and Aphrodisias, both of which are built to face west. The point remains that in the case of Antioch, the orientation of the temple was conditioned by the need for the magnificent facade to face the city’s inhabitants rather than away from them.

292
worship occupied in city life, and the overwhelming manner in which the emperor dominated the world view of his subjects.23

Architecture was thus placed at the service of empire. The strategic prominence of the imperial temples revealed the centrality of the body of the emperor to Rome’s construction of Anatolian space. Power radiated, as if in concentric circles, from the body of the emperor to the bodies of his kin (fictive or real) and outward, beyond the city of Rome to the empire’s furthest-flung territories. Distance from the center did not dilute this imperial presence, for everywhere Caesar’s subjects were tangibly reminded of his authority, celebrated in ritual and made present to them in stone—in awe-inspiring columns, facades and plazas, whether in the heart of urban spaces or from some commanding hill. “Rome” was no longer confined to the imperial city, but every territory where the emperor’s presence and power could be felt.24

The power to regulate space is also the power to regulate the movement of bodies in that space. The construction of these infrastructures required, in the first place, mobilization of economic machinery, including but not limited to material collaboration of a local ruling elite, the commandeering of skilled workers and slave labor, the supply of materials, and provisions for workers. The actual celebration of imperial festivals in cultic sites entailed a broader program of processions, sacrifices, and athletic contests that drew people into the city from the surrounding countryside and concentrated them at the specific location of the event.25 Plazas and porticoes dotted with imperial statues allowed people to gather in engineered spaces that communicated Roman benefaction and wove the imperial family firmly into the fabric of social life. Towering temples drew eyes to look upward and hearts to marvel at their grandeur, and the reliefs on their facades depicted Rome’s unstoppable victory over her enemies. Friesen hardly exaggerates when he describes the impact of the imperial cults in terms of cosmological reconfiguration: the institutions of cult “defined how space and time were to be experienced.”26

25. For a case study of how imperial festivals impacted civic life in Asia Minor, with Oenoanda as a model, see Stephen Mitchell, “Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor,” JRS 80 (2012): 183–93.
26. Friesen, Imperial Cults, 124.
As David Harvey points out, the organization (or reorganization) of space by means of specific practices—such as we find in the imperial cults—concretely shape relationships between people, activities, things, and concepts. The spatial practices of the imperial cults materialized an ideology at the heart of imperialism that was by no means particular to Rome—an ideology in which space became a commodity at the service of empire. The spatial reconfigurations brought about by the imperial cults linked the Roman Empire’s acquired territories to the imperial city in a new geography of domination. By controlling the appropriation of spaces—that is, by infusing social and political life in the provinces with symbols of imperial presence, they envisioned the known world as a satellite of peripheries centered on Rome. The Roman-occupied regions of Anatolia such as Asia were thus construed as “provincial, subsidiary, dependent.” In at least this sense Rome became, in the words of Pliny the Elder, “the parent of all lands” and “the homeland of every people in the entire world.” This geography not only represented space in a particular way; by determining the terms of spatial representation, the imperial geography also produced space—that is, it stipulated the terms in which people were to think of, move, and live in that space. In doing so, it also constructed the identities of the inhabitants of Anatolia in a particular way—as dependent subjects of an expansive and expanding empire.

2. The Locus of Belonging: The “Spiritual House” (1 Peter 2:5) as Spatial Production

Amid these innovations in the spatial imagination of Roman imperialism, we have yet another way of constructing space—that of the early Christians as represented to us in 1 Peter. As David Horrell points out in the preceding essay in this volume, the deployment of the diaspora-Babylon trope in the epistle challenges Rome’s imperial geography with an alternative con-

27. Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 216.
28. Friesen, Imperial Cults, 125.
29. Nat. 3.39.
strual of spatiality—one that decenters the empire both in time and space by evoking a powerful Jewish narrative of violence, subjugation, and exile. By means of a temporal as well as spatial typology, the οἰκουμένη is reimagined as “diaspora” and Rome as Babylon, the archetypal aggressor of God’s elect. The social existence of Christians in Anatolia is, correspondingly, a time of exile (“the time of your exile” [ὁ τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνος, 1:17])—one of displacement, of nonbelonging—the trauma and experience of which looms so large in the Scriptures of Israel. And so, for the Petrine author, it is as it once was: in Babylon and Rome, history finds a rhyme. Had Qoheleth read our text, he might have chimed laconically, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9 NRSV).

If, then, 1 Peter dislocates its readers by casting Anatolia and imperial territories as a whole as exilic or alienating space, does the letter tell its readers where they might, in fact, belong? To put this in social terms: if true Christian existence were marked by nonbelonging within society at large, could Christians find belonging anywhere at all?

a. The οἶκος πνευματικός (1 Peter 2:5) and the Petrine Spatial Imagination

The author’s response to this question is, I believe, in the affirmative, and lies in another trope deployed in his text. In the catena of “stone” passages of 2:4–8, he states that Christians are “being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5). Various exegetes have dedicated their energies to the range of meanings possible for the “spiritual house” (οἶκος πνευματικός) here.32 The


apparent ambiguity arises in large part because of the interpretive options in οἶκος, a word that can refer to both a group of people (household) or a physical edifice or building. Similarly, the adjectival πνευματικός can be understood in various ways, designating that which is “spiritual” as distinguished from the physical or fleshly (ψυχικός; e.g., 1 Cor 15:44, 46), as well as that which pertains to the realm of the human spirit (e.g., 1 Cor 14:14–16) or the spirit of God (e.g., 1 Cor 2:14; 12:1; 14:1). While the expression οἶκος πνευματικός is complicated by the semantic range of its components, several contextual cues serve to allow us to elucidate more precisely its meaning—or, at the very least, its range of meaning.

It is helpful to begin with the observation that this passage occurs within a series of statements regarding the readers’ Christian identity: as newborn infants (2:2), a spiritual priesthood (2:5), and, famously, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (2:9 NRSV). The words οἶκος πνευματικός thus occur within a discussion about people—specifically, believers. It is also clear that the “stones” mentioned in this passage are persons. Christ is described as “a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight” (2:4)—specifically, a cornerstone (ἀκρογωνιαῖος, 2:6)—and the readers are themselves “living stones” (λίθοι ζῶντες, 2:5). If the “stones” that make up the οἶκος are people, it would seem that the primary sense of οἶκος πνευματικός is, correspondingly, a community of people. But is it therefore necessary to conclude that this community is, specifically, a household?

To draw such a conclusion would be hasty and would impoverish the rich dynamics of the “stone” metaphor. The repeated references to stones—five times in 2:4–8, and seven if one includes the cornerstone (ἀκρογωνιαῖος, 2:6; κεφαλὴ γωνίας, 2:7)—yields an architectural density to the passage and foregrounds the structural aspect of this οἶκος. This is further augmented by the verb οἰκοδομεῖσθαι, which denotes the process of construction. What we have here is precisely a play on the semantic flexibility of οἶκος as mean-

33. For a detailed discussion of πνευματικός in 1 Peter as well as the NT in general, see Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Essays (London: Macmillan, 1946), 281–85.

34. Cf. Selwyn, First Epistle, 160; Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 155–56, 158–59; Jobes, 1 Peter, 150. Though it does not directly affect my argument here, οἰκοδομεῖσθαι can be taken as an indicative or imperative, and in the passive or middle voice; cf. F. J. A. Hort, The First Epistle of Peter, I.1–II.17: The Greek Text with Introductory Lecture, Commentary, and Additional Notes (1898; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 109; Mark Dubis, 1 Peter: A Handbook on the Greek Text, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 47–48.
Repairing Social Vertigo

ing both household and building. The two senses are not mutually exclusive but rather dependent on each other.\textsuperscript{35} As a collective, the readers’ integrity as a community in Christ depends on their being fitted together like the stones that make up a single edifice: they are a building of people dependent on Christ as the cornerstone. The corporate (and corporeal) sense of οἶκος is therefore derived from its spatial sense. Any attempt to reduce it to only one of these defuses the power of its imagery and impoverishes the dimensions of the text. Furthermore, as I shall argue below, the structure signified by οἶκος in 2:5 is not just any building, but specifically a temple.

On this point, John Elliott has been famously insistent that οἶκος in 2:5 carries only the sense of “household.”\textsuperscript{36} This position stems largely from the fact that he views οἶκος here as anticipating (and thus parallel in meaning to) βασιλείαν in 2:9, which he takes as a substantive, meaning “royal residence” or “house of the king.”\textsuperscript{37} Moreover, he argues, as an appositive to ιεράτευμα ἄγων, which follows it, οἶκος makes better sense if understood as referring to a group of people, i.e., a household of (priestly) people.\textsuperscript{38} For him, the οἶκος πνευματικός in 2:5 is identical to the οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ in 4:17, where it clearly refers to the Christian community as God’s household, and not to any structural edifice as such.\textsuperscript{39} Elliott therefore maintains that οἶκος in 2:5 can only refer to a group of people (Christians), and cannot carry the spatial sense of “temple.”\textsuperscript{40}

I deem this position indefensible for several reasons. To begin with, given its semantic range, there is no definitive reason to suppose that οἶκος in 2:5 merely anticipates and is parallel to βασιλείαν in 2:9,\textsuperscript{41} or even that it

\textsuperscript{35} For a similar position, see Jobes (\textit{1 Peter}, 150), who extends this versatility in meaning to the use of οἶκος in 4:17.


\textsuperscript{38} Elliott, \textit{1 Peter}, 417.

\textsuperscript{39} Elliott, \textit{Home}, 243.

\textsuperscript{40} Elliott’s dismissal of the οἶκος-as-temple view is really quite sweeping: “temple, priesthood and cult play no central role in 1 Peter” (\textit{Home}, 242). Earlier in the same work, he insists that even ιεράτευμα in 2:5 “has not been employed to describe the community in cultic terms” (168) despite the explicitly liturgical words that follow it, “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God” (ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους [τῷ] θεῷ [NRSV]).

\textsuperscript{41} As Michaels (\textit{1 Peter}, 100–101) and Achtemeier (\textit{1 Peter}, 159) both point out, the relationship between 2:5 and 2:9 is not as straightforward as Elliott contends.
Wei Hsien Wan

is used in the exact same sense as in 4:17. The immediate context of its use ought to be accorded more weight than Elliott allows. Second, while it is true that οἶκος can function in apposition to ἱεράτευμα which follows, it is first and foremost syntactically linked to the preceding images of “living stones” and construction: “you also, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house” (καὶ αὕτοι ὠς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικός [2:5 author’s translation]). This safeguards the sense of οἶκος as being, at the very least, a building. Third, Elliott’s reading does not sufficiently take into consideration the collective impact of the “stone” texts in 2:4–8. The scriptural texts quoted in this section—Isa 28:16, Ps 118:22, and Isa 8:14–15—are, in their original context, references not to just any building, but to a very specific material edifice: the temple in Jerusalem. Finally, the occurrence of οἶκος within a verbal constellation that includes “priesthood” and “sacrifices” (ἱεράτευμα and θυσίαι, 2:5) is laden with cultic overtones, leading the majority of interpreters to conclude, not only that the Petrine author has a physical structure in mind, but that it is a temple.

That the οἶκος of 2:5 refers to a temple is reinforced by its pairing with πνευματικός. The broader context suggests that this οἶκος is πνευματικός or “spiritual” not in the sense that it is invisible or nonmaterial (no cues in the context warrant this contrast), but rather that it is “of the spirit (of God)”—that is, “caused by or filled with the (divine) spirit.” This sense is brought out both by the fact that (1) οἶκος πνευματικός occurs in a section dedicated to the believers’ identity (cf. 2:1–10 as a whole, but especially vv. 9–10); and (2) immediately following the explication of this identity, the author urges them “to abstain from carnal desires” (ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν)

42. Although this is not necessary, since εἰς in 2:5 can also be read as purposive to yield the reading: “a spiritual house for (the ministry of) a holy priesthood.” On this, see Hort, First Epistle, 109; Michaels, 1 Peter, 100.

43. Representative are Ernest Best, 1 Peter, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1971), 101–102; Selwyn, First Epistle, 159–160; Kelly, Commentary, 89; Goppelt, 1 Peter, 140; Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 156. Cf. Elliott, Home, 241–43. Even Michaels (1 Peter, 100), who leans in favor of Elliott’s “house” or “household” reading, concedes that “it is difficult to imagine a house intended for priesthood as being anything other than a temple of some sort.” So also David G. Horrell, The Epistles of Peter and Jude, EC (Peterborough: Epworth, 1998), 40.

44. BDAG, 678, s.v. πνευματικός §2; Achtemeier (1 Peter, 155–56): “The adjective πνευματικός (‘spiritual’) is not so much symbolic or metaphoric as it is intended to indicate its nature [i.e., that of the ‘house’]: it is the place where the Spirit is to be found.” Cf. Selwyn, First Epistle, 160, 291. Elliott agrees with taking the adjective πνευματικός in this way (“controlled and animated by God’s sanctifying spirit”; 1 Peter, 418), although, as shown above, he does not allow for the house to be a temple (cf. Home, 168). Elliott, 1 Peter, 418.
that wage war against their soul (2:11), reflecting the spiritual-carnal antithesis we find elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., John 3:5–6; 1 Cor 3:1). This assertion regarding the readers’ spiritual identity develops the author’s initial description of them as those who have been made holy by God’s Spirit (1:2) and are called to be holy as God is holy (1:16). Not surprisingly, the author later refers to them as people on whom “the divine Spirit of glory” rests (τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα, 4:14), a description again redolent of a temple (cf. Eph 2:21–22).

We may thus conclude that οἶκος πνευματικός in 2:5 means “a spiritual house” in the sense of an edifice that stands in a particular relationship to God’s Spirit. It is, as Horrell posits, “a building which belongs to God and where the Spirit is to be found.” More specifically, as the liturgically saturated vocabulary of the verse indicates, it is a temple whose constitutive building blocks (“living stones”) are “quickened and governed by the Spirit of God.” with Jesus as the living cornerstone (2:7). This temple is the locus of the offering of spiritual sacrifices, since the community not only constitutes the temple itself but also the holy priesthood that serves within it (2:5, 9). In the words of Selwyn, “the house is spiritual, because it consists of spiritual persons and exists for spiritual purposes.”

b. Contesting Spatial Imaginations

Although exegesis of 1 Peter has been dedicated to the range of meanings possible for this οἶκος πνευματικός—with the consensus leaning in favor of understanding it as a reference to God’s temple—scholars have yet to tease out the spatial implications of this image. How does οἶκος πνευματικός fit into the author’s spatial strategy, his construction of space, in the letter as a whole? The answer lies in taking more seriously the spatiality inherent in the very meaning of οἶκος πνευματικός itself.

45. Horrell, Epistles, 40. Similarly, Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 155–56.
46. Selwyn, First Epistle, 283.
47. First Epistle, 284–85. Tempting though it may be to speculate as to where this temple stands in relation to the Jerusalem temple, any proposals must remain tenuous. Is the spiritual house he envisions simply an alternative temple, a more authentic temple, or, indeed, a replacement for the temple destroyed in the Jewish-Roman war? The author’s silence on this matter is palpable, and is part of a broader exegetical mystery—that of Christians’ relationship to Israel in the letter (cf. the concise discussion in Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 69–72 and notes there).
The author sets before us the image of a temple made up of “living stones”—that is, Christians and Christ himself (the paradigmatic living stone and cornerstone). What we are confronted with is a way of envisioning Christian solidarity: a temple made up of material bodies, both those of believers and of the vindicated Jesus, who has now become its cornerstone (2:7). To read οἶκος πνευματικός in this way is not to take the expression in a wooden or hyperliteral sense, but rather to think of it as robustly material, spatial, and imaginative. It tells us that Christian bodies, spread throughout the Anatolian terrain in their respective communities, are simultaneously asked to conceive of themselves as a single, transspatial temple joined in Christ and animated by God’s Spirit. While the corporate nature of this temple image is often appreciated by interpreters, its corporeal character has been less so. Yet the οἶκος πνευματικός is made up of actual, material, living bodies joined in solidarity with the once-broken, now-glorified body of Jesus. The architect of solidarity is none other than God, who is also the builder of this temple (the implied performer of οἰκοδομεῖσθε, 2:5). The bonds forged by this divine construction project are, I argue, as real in the author’s mind as the mystical kinship invoked elsewhere in the letter: God is the Father (1:2, 3) over the household of believers (4:17) made up of siblings scattered throughout not only Asia Minor but also “the world” (2:17, 5:9; cf. 5:12: Silvanus as “brother”).

The readers of 1 Peter, therefore, are not only to be thought of as aliens and sojourners. Their existence in the world is marked by estrangement, yes—but there is also a place where they belong: in the imagined but no less real οἶκος πνευματικός made up of their bodies and constituted as a divine collective. Scattered throughout Anatolia as dispersed communities, they are nonetheless united by one Father, one Lord, and one sanctifying Spirit (1:2). Already in the letter’s opening we are presented with a paradox: the spatial dispersion of the recipients across the vastness of Roman Anatolia (“diaspora”), counterbalanced by their solidarity effected by divine election. The author underscores this paradox again toward the end of the letter, speaking of a family (ἀδελφότης, lit. “brotherhood”) scattered throughout the world that is yet united in their share of Christ’s sufferings (5:9; cf. 4:13). To paraphrase Paul, the temple is one and made up many living stones, and all the living stones, though many, are one temple in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:16, 12:12).

This temple of living stones is by no means “other-worldly,” but in fact very “this-worldly”—present in the here and now because of the believers who comprise it. That they live as aliens and sojourners in society need not
necessarily imply that their only true home is in heaven—an inference Elliott has been so careful to guard against—but they belong to this world in a different way. In fact, it is precisely the temple’s “this-worldliness” that causes the Christian experience of disjuncture from non-Christian bodies that inhabit shared spaces. The Christian experience of nonbelonging is tied to the liminal nature of their existence: they are a community unto themselves moving amid communities regulated according to a different logic. Despite this difference, their corporate identity as God’s spiritual house does not change the fact that they continue to live in spheres governed by the dictates of the status quo. As the author’s paraenetic concerns in the letter (esp. 2:11–3:7) indicate, Christians remain subject to regulations set by civic authorities, Christian slaves continue to be subject to the authority of their non-Christian masters, and Christian wives to that of their non-Christian husbands. What they must negotiate is how to live Christianly while remaining bound in daily practice and duty to non-Christian bodies—and this is precisely what the author sets out to help them do: to live out their exilic life in the fear of God (cf. 1:17; 2:12, 17).

3. Spatial Production, Resistance, Belonging

I will draw a map of what you never see
and guess me whose map will be bigger than whose?
Guess me whose map will tell the larger truth?48

The reconfigurations of space reflected in the imperial cults sought to draw everybody—by which I mean all bodies—into a relationship with the rule of the Caesars. The structures and practices of the cults, from temples to festivals and everything in between, must be seen in terms of their very material, even visceral, effects: namely, the regulation of the movement of imperial subjects according to dictates of Roman power. In Harvey’s terms, Rome’s power to control the appropriation of space—i.e., the manner in which space is occupied by objects (buildings, squares, streets, etc.), activities (uses), and people (particular individuals, classes or groups)—amounts de facto to the Empire’s domination of that space.49

Once the full force of this spatial imagination is appreciated, the Chris-

48. The rastaman, in Miller, Cartographer, 19.
49. Cf. Harvey, Condition, 122.
Christian discourse of space in 1 Peter easily emerges as its competitor. If the imperial cults filled spaces with symbols and structures of Roman power radiating from a center, 1 Peter disputed these attempts by asserting an alternative view. Just as Caesar’s power was not limited to the boundaries of the city of Rome but was to be venerated in satellites of cult, the collective body of believers transcended discrete boundaries by virtue of their divine election in and through Christ. On the one hand, 1 Peter normalized the Christian experience of nonbelonging in Roman spaces and redefined this alienation as the hallmark of Christian existence. Believers were construed as aliens and sojourners in diaspora. At the same time—and just as crucially—they are living stones fitted together into a single, transspatial temple of cosmic “brotherhood”—a universal Christian society bound together precisely by estrangement and persecution. It was thus in their nonbelonging in Roman space that they in fact belonged together. Their solidarity as one spiritual house, one temple indwelt by God’s spirit, is corollary to and counterbalances the social vertigo they experience as aliens and sojourners, as inhabitants of the social margins. They are thus at once truly “at home” and truly “homeless” (cf. Diogn. 5).

We must bear in mind that both the Roman and Petrine ways of imagining space were operative concurrently, on the same bodies, and in the same space—Roman Anatolia. Each in their own right is an attempt to shape spatial, embodied practice—to modify how space is both conceived and lived in and through the body. The Roman “units” of spatial imagination—that is, the provinces that make up the imperial body politic—are acknowledged in 1 Peter (1:1)—along with their mechanics of governance (e.g., governors as representatives of the emperor, 2:13–17), demonstrating the author’s awareness of their existence. Yet it is precisely this awareness of them that brings into sharper focus the distinctive features of his alternative spatial imagination—one that cuts across the boundaries imposed by the empire’s geography of power and redefines space in terms of life and solidarity in Christ. As such, the configuration of space in 1 Peter must be regarded as an act of resistance, a genuine challenge to Roman hegemony because it imagined that shared space—and indeed the world—very differently.

The space produced in 1 Peter, therefore, simultaneously dislocates and relocates.50 It dislocates the readers by rendering them aliens and sojourners, relocates the body by constructing a new universal identity in Christ.

50. Horrell, “Beyond Conformity,” 229: “What [1 Peter] does . . . is to insert its readers into a particular narrative of identity which ‘places’—or rather, displaces—them in a specific position vis-à-vis empire.”
inhabitants of a diaspora. It relocates them—or rather, reveals their true location—within a spiritual house, situated not in another plane of existence or some distant heaven, but in the very same spaces of their dislocation. Where is this “spiritual house” in which they serve as priests, offering spiritual sacrifices? It is everywhere they are—in the very spaces of the daily grind occupied by their bodies and transformed by their activities. This material—even metaphysical—renovation of spatial practice is as real as their new birth in Christ (cf. 1:3, 23), and is in fact bound up with that new existence. Not surprisingly, the author’s exhortation that they, like newborn infants, “grow into salvation” (2:2) is immediately followed by his injunction that they approach the living stone that is also the cornerstone of the spiritual house (2:4). The temple comes into being not simply because the readers are asked to think of space in a novel way, but because God is already at work in them, building them into a dwelling place for his Spirit of glory (cf. 4:14). This is the truth—the spatial reality—they must confess, and by which they must live.