Inequality in the Study of Antiquity: Elisha and the Ambivalent Power of the Prophetic Body

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Thurs., Oct. 26, 2017
3:30 – 4:50 pm
Mandel G12

The Elisha narratives repeatedly direct attention to the prophet’s body; this body, however, is frequently deficient, precarious, or powerless. In particular, the prophet’s body often fails to meet the standard of normative biblical masculinity. However, it is in its weakness and masculine difficulty that Elisha’s body is most powerful. After framing Elisha’s body in the broader context of problematic prophetic masculine embodiment, the talk surveys key moments in Elisha’s embodiment, including the incident with the boys at Bethel (2 Kgs 2:23-25), the restoration of the Shunammite’s son (2 Kgs 4:8-37), and the life-giving powers of the prophet’s bones after his death (2 Kgs 13:20-21). Understanding the prophet Elisha requires understanding the prophet’s body; understanding the prophet’s body, in turn, opens a world of meanings and possibilities of its own, with particular significance for masculinity and materiality.

Lecture offered during NEJS 117b: Death, Memorial, and Immortality in Biblical Literature with Professor Vayntrub.

Co-sponsored by Near Eastern and Judaic Studies and its graduate program in Bible and Ancient Near East, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and a generous grant from the Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programming.