Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, Song Thirteen: Ambiguity, Mysticism, and Cognitive Neuroscience

Annette Evans
University of the Free State, South Africa
ahmevans@gmail.com

Abstract

A striking characteristic of *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* is the lack of clarity as to when the participants are human and when angelic. Scholarly opinion has been divided on the question. Fletcher-Louis, for instance, argued for an "angelomorphic" theology in *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. Scholars regard this text as an example of mysticism at Qumran, but the root of the term "mystic" (to conceal) warns of the difficulties inherent in any analysis of mystical texts because such texts arise from religious experience of a transcendent divine presence only accessible subjectively. In a previous article on ambiguity in the First Song it was argued in support of Fletcher-Louis that the text was deliberately constructed to create ambiguity between angelic agents and sectarian participants for rhetorical purposes. This article resorts to insights from cognitive neuroscience in order to reconsider current scholarly opinion on this matter.

Keywords: *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*; Song Thirteen; mysticism; ambiguity; cognitive neuroscience; Fletcher-Louis

Introduction

"And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Exod 19:6 KJV)

Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (henceforth SOSS) was published initially by Carol Newsom in 1985, and finally in 1998.[1] The First Song indicates that this liturgical text was intended for communal worship for a group with a strong priestly identity, but there is a striking ambiguity throughout all thirteen songs as to whether and when the

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1 Newsom (1985; 1998, 173–403). Garcia Martinez, Tigchelaar and van der Woude published very fragmentary remnants of the Thirteenth Song belonging to 11QSS Columns IX and X in DJD in 1998, but they are not relevant to this discussion.

participants are human and when angelic. Newsom (1998, 177) concluded that SOSS is concerned with an angelic priesthood but Fletcher-Louis (2017, 142, 144, 145) points out that Newsom's approach tends "to disassociate the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from mainstream biblical theology and spirituality." The initial mention of repentance, purification, and holiness in connection with the establishment of the priests tends to suggest that these requirements would be applicable to humans, not angelic (i.e., already divine) beings. However, in the later apocryphal book *I Enoch Book of Parables* (chapters 37 to 71) which was present at Qumran, repentance is available to the rebellious angels (Evans 2007, 128). That the requirement of repentance for the participants in the liturgy is prominent in the introductory First Song alerts the reader to the question of whether angels or humans are being referred to throughout SOSS, and even raises the further question of whether the ambiguity may be deliberate.

The following factors play a role in the pervasive ambiguity of this text:

1. Terminology for divine beings. Sometimes it is only the context which can guide the translator as to whether God, gods, angels or humans are being referred to. Examples of such ambiguity (as also, for instance, seen in Psalm 82) have been previously discussed as they appear in SOSS (Evans 2017, 650; 2018b, 4).

2. Word play and multivalency are known to be characteristics of the Hebrew scriptures. Parallelism is often present, and there are passages which seem to have a strong rhythm and beat but the prosody of the Songs has never been adequately studied.[2] The need for a more developed understanding of the nature of Qumran poetry has been stressed by Davila (2010, 440).

3. Davila (2010, 441–43) recognises that the performance of this liturgy "must have been a profoundly moving liturgical communion with the heavenly realm for its participants ... it seems entirely appropriate to think of it as mystical." However, the term "mysticism" is problematic in that it implies the existence of realities which are beyond perceptual or intellectual apprehension. Mysticism is central to being but only subjectively perceptible. It arises from religious *experience* of a transcendent divine presence which stands behind the visible, material world (Alexander 2006, 5–8; 118–19, 138). The derivation of the term from the Greek *muw* ('to conceal') conveys the difficulty of discourse about mysticism.[3] In his attempts to isolate "a real, coherent, distinctive and significant set of phenomena" for a definition of mysticism, Alexander (2006, 8, 118–19, 138) recognises that the desire for a closer relationship with the divine presence is common to mystical traditions, and that mysticism always demands a *via mystica*—a way by which the mystic sets out to attempt union/communion with the divine. Fletcher-Louis

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2   Qumran was a "logocentric community," for them "words were charged with enormous meaning and power" (Alexander 2006, 115, 116).

3   *Analytical Greek Lexicon* (1975, 273).

identifies the key ideas of Qumran mysticism as the celestial temple, communion with the angels through liturgy, and the ultimate "angelification" of the mystic. He (2002, 379–86, 392; 2017, 161) proposed an "angelo-morphic theology" which ascribes a divine identity to the sectarian participants in SOSS. This article considers the validity of Fletcher-Louis's understanding of SOSS with the aid of insights from cognitive neuroscience.

4. The element of hiddenness as contained in the root of the word mysticism suggests the possibility of ambiguity as a deliberate rhetorical device. Rhetorical devices employed to convey "hidden polemics" have been described by Amit (2000, xii, 3–4, 97). The possibility of a similar intention in SOSS has been considered by Evans (2017, 660; 2018a; 2018b).[4]

Methodology

This article examines the concluding Thirteenth Song as a culminating test of the hypothesis that rhetorical construction of ambiguity creates a fluidity between godlike beings/angels and human participants in order to describe the mystical attainment of deification by human beings. Recent observations from the discipline of cognitive neuroscience are referred to in order to understand how this temporary state is achieved through participation in the liturgy.

The main part of the thirteenth and final Sabbath Song is contained in 4Q405 Frg. 23ii. This fragment consists of three sections formed by two *vacats*: lines 1–7a; lines 7b–11; lines 12–13.[5] Difficulties of interpretation due to the fragmentary state of the text are kept separate from the issue of discerning the intended meaning as a result of semantic ambiguity.

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4   Alexander (2006, 117) recognised that the sense of a mystical experience of the "grand climax" in Songs Twelve and Thirteen, achieved by the chanting of the Songs, was a "shrewd manipulation of human psychology" for rhetorical purposes.

5   Newsom (1998, 363) cautions that one cannot be sure that the *vacat* is an intentional division between sentences, but in this case the view of Ulrich and Flint (2010, xv) that a *vacat* is an indication of a division is accepted because it helps to understand the text.

Shirot 'Olat Hashabbat **4Q405 Frg. 23ii**

Frg. 23 ii

] ̇ם תפארת לפתוחי [	1
ק̇ר̇בו מלך בשרתם לפ̇נ̇י[	2
מלך וחרת כבודה ה̇[	3
קדוש מקדש כול [	4
אפ̇ודיהם יפרוש̇[ו	5
ק̇דושים רצון [ ]°°°[ ]°[ ]°°°[ ]°[ ]°[ ]ר̇ו̇ח̇ו̇ת̇ קד̇[ושי]°[ ]°[ ]°	6
ק̇ד̇ש̇י̇ה̇ם *vacat* במעמד פלאיהם רוחות רוקמה כמעשי אורג פתוחי צורות הדר	7
ב̇תוך כבוד מרא̇י שני צבעי אור רוח קודש קדשים מחזקות מעמד קודשם לפני̇[	8
[מ̇]לך רוחי צבע̇[י]טוהר ב̇תוך מראי חור ו̇ד̇מ̇ות רוח כבוד כמעשי אופירים מאירי̇[ם	9
[או̇]ר̇ וכול מחשביהם ממולח טוהר חשב כמעשי אורג̇ אלה ראשי לבושי פלא לש̇ר̇ו̇[ת	10
ראשי ממלכות ממלכות קדושים למלך ה̇קודש בכול מרומי̇ מקדשי מלכות	11
כבודו *vacat* בראשי תרומות לשוני דעת̇ ו̇[ברכו לאלוהי דעת בכול מעשי כבודו	12
[ ]ק̇ות מסר̇י̇ם בכול [ ]ה̇[ ] ק̇ו̇ד̇[ש]ד̇עת בינתו ובשכל [כב]ו̇ד̇ו̇[ ]°°°°	13

Lines 1–7a[6]

] ̇ם תפארת לפתוחי [	1
ק̇ר̇בו מלך בשרתם לפ̇נ̇י[	2
מלך וחרת כבודה ה̇[	3
קדוש מקדש כול [	4
אפ̇ודיהם יפרוש̇[ו	5
ק̇דושים רצון [ ]°°°[ ]°[ ]°°°[ ]°[ ]°[ ]ר̇ו̇ח̇ו̇ת̇ קד̇[ושי]°[ ]°[ ]°	6
ק̇ד̇ש̇י̇ה̇ם *vacat* במעמד פלאיהם רוחות רוקמה כמעשי אורג פתוחי צורות הדר	7

1.]*m* the beauty of the engravings of [
2. they approach the King when they serve be[fore
3. King, and He inscribed His glory *h*[
4. holy, the sanctuary of all [
5. their *ephodim*: [they] spread out[
6. holy ones, good favour [ ],[ ]…[ ] [ ]…[ ].[ ].[ ]spirits of the ho[ly ones].[ ].
7. their holy places. *Vacat.*

The following nine nouns are mentioned in sequence: engravings, King, glory, sanctuary, *ephodim*, holy ones, favour, spirits of the holy ones, holy places. These are discussed below in the sequence in which they appear.

Line 1: The engravings are beautiful. It should be kept in mind that engravings are essentially two-dimensional.

Line 2: The fragmentary state of the manuscript here precludes clarity as to who or what it is that approaches "when they serve be[fore …" It is assumed that the King alludes to God. At this stage in the reading it is not clear whether angels or humans are serving before the King. As the reading proceeds it seems possible that it is the two-dimensional engravings themselves which serve before the King, and although this lack of clarity may be due to the manuscript's fragmentary state, deliberate ambiguity is also a possibility.

Line 3: The King inscribed his glory. Fletcher-Louis (2002, 357) suggests that perhaps this is a reference to Exodus 28:36 (the inscribing of "Holiness to the Lord" on the gold plate to be worn on Aaron's forehead). Although in the biblical text it is "with the work of an engraver" that Moses does the inscribing, in line 3 it is the "King" himself. This is a very interesting detail because if the act of inscribing (חרת) by the King has produced the beautiful engravings of line 1 the implication is that their holiness is bestowed by the King.

Line 4: Due to the fragmentary state of the manuscript it is not clear whether the sanctuary which is holy is for "all" or whether "all" was intended to delimit a specific group of some sort of functionaries as apparently described in earlier Songs.[7] At this stage it is not clear where or what the sanctuary is.

Line 5: The *ephodim* are "spread out." The significance of the surprising mention of "their *ephodim*" in the plural becomes clearer as the text proceeds. The possible reference to Exodus 25 suggested by Fletcher-Louis (2002, 357) for line 3 becomes more certain now in that the idea of the *ephodim* obviously refers to Exodus 25ff. In the preceding Song Twelve the connection with the giving of the law in Exodus 19–20 strengthens the connection to Exodus 25ff., hence that the *ephod* is a garment worn by

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7   See Evans (2017, 649, 653).

a human priest.[8] If Exodus 25:7 is the source of the reference to *ephodim* in line 5, then the verse that follows (Exod 25:8) "and let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" implies that the sanctuary in line 4 is indeed the place "where the Lord dwells." A significant difference between the biblical text and these lines in Song Thirteen is that here in SOSS the description of the sanctuary is ethereal and abstract.

Line 6 and 7a: "spirits of the holy ones" are in "their holy places." Parallelism here confirms that the sanctuary of line 4 is equivalent to "the holy places of the spirits of the holy ones." The ambiguity from the mention of the *ephodim* in line 5 onwards up to the *vacat* stems from the fact that it is a locative description (i.e., "places"), yet non-physical ("the spirits"). By line 6 it seems that it could be the two-dimensional engravings which are clothed with the *ephodim*, in which case the combination of two and three dimensions ("clothed with garments," 7b) becomes difficult to visualise. This introduction at the end of the first section to a transition to intangible realities is confirmed in the middle section where a further transition takes place from two-dimensional engravings to non-dimensional "spirits." The sanctuary where the Lord dwells becomes an intangible, purely abstract concept.

Lines 7b–11[9]

קָ֯דשׁי֯הם *vacat* במעמד פלאיהם רוחות רֹוקמה כמעשׁי אורג פתוחי צורות הדר	7
בתוך כבוד מראֹי שֹנֹי צבעי אור רוח קוֹדשׁ קדשׁים מחזקות מעמד קודשׁם לפנֹי֯	8
[מ]ל֯ך רוחי צבעי֯ טֹהר [בתוך מראֹי חוֹר וֹדֹמות רוח כבוד כמעשֹׁי אופירים מאיר֯י֯	9
[אוֹ]ר֯ וכול מחשביֹדהם ממולח טֹהר חשׁב בֹמעשֹׁי אורֹג אלה ראשׁי לבושׁי פלא לשֹרֹת֯	10
ראשׁי ממלכות ממלכות קדושׁים למלֹך הֹקוֹדשׁ בכול מרומֹי֯ מקדשׁי מלכות	11

7b. In their wondrous stations are spirits (clothed with garments of) mingled colours, like woven work, engraved with figures of splendour.
8. In the midst of the glorious appearance of scarlet are (garments) dyed with the fire of a most holy spirit, those who take their holy station before[.
9. [K]ing, spirits [brightly] dyed in the midst of the appearance of whiteness. And the likeness of this glorious spirit is like fine gold work, shedding[
10. [lig]ht. And all their designs are brightly blended, an artistry like woven work. These are the chiefs of those wondrously arrayed for service.[
11. the chiefs of the realm {{realm}} of the holy ones of the King of holiness in all the heights of the sanctuaries of His glorious kingdom.
12. *vacat.*

In this middle section, 29 nouns are mentioned. The King and "chiefs" could initially be understood as concrete entities, whereas the rest of the nouns from line 7b to 10a are qualified by adjectives which depict them as intangible and abstract. This ethereal description refers to angelic motifs throughout the rest of the middle section.[10] This section ends by stating that "these are the chiefs of those wondrously arrayed for service," repeated in parallel: "the chiefs of the realm." The implication is that at this stage these chiefs are angelic beings.

Thus, a transformation has taken place. The intangible spirits are described in terms of the major angelic motifs of fire and light. The chiefs are now non-dimensional, spiritual chiefs of the realm.[11] The "spirits of the holy ones" are in their "wondrous stations" before the King, but it becomes apparent that their garments consist of an intangible clothing of mingled colours dispersing light. They are chiefs of "those wondrously arrayed for service," conveying mingled colours dispersing light in all directions, using major angelological motifs. The description in Ezekiel 1:4 of the initial appearance of the living beings also has a distributive, scattering quality in the use of the *hitpʿael* מתלקחת in combination with "flashing fire" and/or "lightning." Newsom (1998, 362) uses the term "fine gold" for the word מאירי in line 9b. Interestingly, at Ezekiel 1:4 and 27, LXX and NETS render the word חשמל as "*electron*," but where it also appears in 8:2 NETS it is rendered as "white gold." The KJV translates all three occurrences of the word חשמל as "amber." The significance of the translation of amber is that it was known to possess the property of static electricity, hence the Greek translation is *electron*. It is because of its property of static electricity that amber has been thought of as a mystic stone possessing magical properties.[12] In Ezekiel 1:4, 27 and 8:2 חשמל is intimately associated with the holiness of Yahweh and with fire. In its association with the static electricity property of amber, חשמל implies a generative, communicative function which is appropriate in this context. It is interesting that this fragment uses the word מאירי ('fine gold'), not חשמל, which appears only three times in the Bible (in Ezekiel), even though it does appear elsewhere in SOSS (in Song 12, 4Q405 Frg. 20ii–21–22, line 10).

These lines, 7b–11, make it clear that the two-dimensional engravings that have been transformed into "spirits" are functioning in a non-physical realm. That non-dimensional spirits are clothed with garments that are shedding light is an indication that the "sanctuaries of the King of holiness of His glorious kingdom" are meant to be conceived as multiple non-dimensional, abstract entities. Because of the connection to Exodus it is possible that the spirits shedding light could be an elaborate ethereal description of the visual effect of the sparkling stones of the breastplate which overhangs the *ephod*. In the biblical description the breast-piece, with its twelve gems of various colours, was positioned over the high priest's *ephod* and the gems, as all gems

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10 Evans (2007, 266–67).

11 Evans (2008, 447).

12 For this reason, it was long used as an amulet, especially in the Near and Far East (Untracht 1982, 562; Evans 2013, 170–72).

do, would be dispersing light. This collection of gems (*Urim* and *Thummim*, Exod 28:30) was intended to be used by the high priest for divination, i.e., for knowledge of God's will. Interestingly, in SOSS there is no direct mention of the breastplate or of the *Urim* and *Thummim.* This description is devoid of any physical evidence associated with the priestly practice of divination, yet it describes the mingled colours shedding light, just as the different coloured gems of the breast-piece would be giving light in the sense of dispensing knowledge for the high priest during the divination process.[13]

The beginning of this fragment—"they approach the King when they serve be[fore" (line 2)—reiterates the angelic functioning of serving the King described in the Twelfth Sabbath Song.[14] The remarkable effect of transmutation into special visual effects that was first described in the penultimate Twelfth Song is even more apparent in this middle section of the Thirteenth Song. Here, in an elaboration of the description of the "spirits of the holy ones" the engravings "like woven work" are transmuted into "the chiefs of the realm of the holy ones of the King of holiness." This section is the fulcrum upon which the crucial question swings: are these "spirits" which are described as "chiefs" angelic or human? Fletcher-Louis (2002, 365–68) discusses the difficulty of finding a conclusive answer, not only because of the complexity of this part of the text, but also because of damage to the scroll. The implications of this issue are taken up below and in the conclusion.

The connection of the customary reading of Ezekiel 1 and the giving of the law in Exodus to the penultimate Song Twelve becomes more meaningful when seen in the light of this passage in the final Song Thirteen. From line 8 onwards the two major motifs of angelology are mentioned, i.e., fire and light. The description of the angelological motif of "fire of a most holy spirit" is intensified in lines 9 to 10a. Lines 10b to 11 strengthen the communicating thrust of this section: these are the chiefs of the "realm of the holy ones of the King of holiness in all the heights of the sanctuaries of His glorious kingdom."[15] The phrase "garments dyed with the fire of a most holy spirit," especially in combination with the mention of "fine gold work shedding light" and "whiteness" make a direct connection to Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1.[16] The Seventh Song 4Q403 Frg. 1ii lines 7 and 9 mentions "coals of fire" and "divine spirits, shapes

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13   Cf. 11Q17 (*Shirot 'Olat ha-Shabbat*) Frgs. 21a–b, 22 lines 7–9:
     7 [   ]beautiful [th]reads [   ] multicoloured like [woven] work   ] purely blended, the colours of
     8 [splen]dour [and] majesty [   ] figures [   ] ephod
     9 [   ] angels [   ] his [holi]ness.
     The only other reference to the *ephodim* is in the unplaced Frg. 41 (Newsom 1998, 374) which mentions "breastplates," also in the plural.
14   See Evans (2018a, 6).
15   Newsom (1998, 365) suggests the second "realm" is probably dittography but recognises other semantic possibilities such as a distributive (every) or superlative (highest) sense being conveyed. I suspect that the repetition could be for emphasis as the beginning of a new sentence.
16   The statement in line 8 (garments) "dyed with the fire of a most holy spirit" being preceded by "scarlet" enhances the association with fire.

of flaming fire round about it." This clear allusion to Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1 of the deity enthroned and surrounded by angels with the four faces of man, lion, ox and eagle is repeated here in Song Twelve (4Q405, frg. 22, line 10–11a).[17]

The research question becomes pertinent here: are these two-dimensional "engravings," which are now described as spirits, actually the participants in the liturgy who were made holy through being inscribed/engraved by the "King"? Have the human participants now gained access to divinity and transformed into non-dimensional spirits wearing non-dimensional garments of mingled coloured rays of light which disperse white light?[18] The final section makes the answer clear.

Lines 12–13[19]

כבודו *vacat* בראשי תרומות לשוני דעת ו[ברכו לאלוהי דעת בכול מעשי כבודו   12

[   ]קּוֹח מסרֹ[ֹתם בכול   ] [א] קֹדֹ[ש   ]דֹעת בינתו ובשכל [כבֹ]וֹדֹ[ו]ֹ[13

12 *vacat* In the chiefs of praise-offering are tongues of knowledge;[and] they bless the God of knowledge together with all His glorious works.
13]*qwt* of their divisions in all the ho[ly   ]*r*[   ]His insightful knowledge and in His [glo]rious wisdom …[.

The "spirits of the holy ones" (line 6), who were inscribed with holiness by the King, are identified in line 12 as the chiefs of the realm/kingdom. Here, at the end of the liturgy, they have tongues of knowledge and bless the God of knowledge. The reference to knowledge in these concluding lines of SOSS hark back to the First Song (4Q400 Frg. 1i, lines 5–6): "He inscribed His statutes concerning all spiritual matters and precepts of [ ] knowledge (דעת), people of discernment, honoured by God." It is *people* of discernment who draw near to knowledge, not angels. The introductory First Song connects people with knowledge; in the final Song it is the subject of knowledge that brings the SOSS to conclusion, and again in association with people, now transformed by holiness into non-dimensional spirits wearing *ephodim*.

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17 "Like the appearance of fire (are) the most holy spirits round about, the appearance of streams of fire like *hashmal*. And there is a radiant substance with glorious mingled colours, wondrously hued, brightly blended, the spirits of living [g]odlike beings which move continuously with the glory of the wondrous chariots" (4Q405, Frg. 20ii–21–22, lines 10b–11, Newsom 1998, 347).

18 The description of "mingled colours" in combination with "spirits [brightly] dyed in the midst of the appearance of whiteness" conforms to the scientific fact that a mixture of light rays of primary colours yields the colour white.

19 Translation by Newsom (1998, 362).

Discussion

Davila (2010, 442) succinctly outlines Fletcher-Louis's (2002, 292–394) argument as follows:

> human priestly practitioners are the actual participants in the heavenly liturgy and were regarded to have undergone a process of angelification during the experience … the apparent angelic figures in the Songs are actually the human sectarian priesthood, who are liturgically exalted to worship alongside the heavenly sprits that make up the animate architectural components of the macrocosmic temple and to mediate the Divine Glory for the earthly community.

Fletcher-Louis (2017, 142) recognises a genuine *Engelgemeinschaft* in SOSS: the concept of human worshippers united with angelic beings (as still found in the Coptic Orthodox Church today). He notes that sometimes in the Songs the human community are ascribed "god" language (such as *elim* and *Elohim*) and at other times inconvertibly as mortal i.e., people of discernment, priests, princes, holy ones, holiest of the holy ones. He concludes that the theological orientation of the author was that humanity was originally created to be "God's living image-idol."

This article supports Fletcher-Louis's claim (2002, 260, 267, 274; 2017, 144, 161–66), but in a more nuanced way. It is argued that it is the actively participating sectarians, having been made holy by the King, who, in their non-dimensional spiritual state, are the chiefs of the kingdom (realm) and have tongues of knowledge. The dualistic orientation in other texts found at Qumran has influenced scholarly criticism of Fletcher-Louis's claims. For instance, Alexander (2006, 44–47) claims that "the whole liturgy turns on a dualism between earth and heaven, between the worshipping congregation below and the worshipping congregation above, and on the attempts of the earthly congregation to overcome this dichotomy." As Alexander sees it, the congregation exhorts the angels in heaven to perform their priestly duties in the celestial temple, and somehow through this liturgical act the congregation feels drawn into union with the angels in worshipping God.[20] To support his argument, Alexander (2006, 46) refers to the Second Song in which the participants/sectarians compare themselves to the *elim.* He claims that "[i]t is surely impossible to read this text plausibly in a non-dualistic way." However, Davila (2010:442) understands the self-expressed unworthiness of the "people of discernment" from a different point of view: "this should be understood as an opening confession of unworthiness by participants who are to be welcomed into the

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20　At the point in time when Alexander propounded this opinion Qumran scholars were overly mindful of the prominence of dualism in several of the major texts, to the extent that Zoroastricism was considered as an influence, but Collins (2011, 154) points that that the sources for Zoroastricism are late (sixth to ninth century).

angelic realm nonetheless by divine grace."[21] Fletcher-Louis has criticised Newsom's and Alexander's perception of dualism in SOSS, claiming that in SOSS there is no heavenly temple and no angelic liturgy (2002, 391–92; 2017, 141, 143, 152).

Scholars have also criticised Fletcher-Louis's exegesis because he discounts the evidence of the Hekhalot literature concerning the characteristics of angels, and the terminology derived from 1 Chronicles 28–29. They see a trajectory between Chronicles and the Hekhalot literature with SOSS fitting in between. However, the lateness of the origin of the Hekhalot texts makes it pointless to try and establish a literary influence on the SOSS from the Hekhalot texts, although Davila sees a trajectory from 1 Chronicles 28–29 to the later Hekhalot literature, with SOSS in between (Davila 2010, 442, 451).

Evidence in Support of a Human Priesthood

The Connection between Ezekiel 1, Exodus, and SOSS

The connection of the mystical aspects of Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1 and its use in SOSS is striking. For instance, both the mysterious substance *hashmal* in Ezekiel 1 and the description of the sanctuary of the "King" in his "kingdom" in the ending of the final Song of SOSS are mystical expressions of the essence of God on his throne in terms of light, knowledge, and communication.[22] Both descriptions are associated with living beings initially described as three-dimensional, who have been transformed into a spiritual state which is impossible to visualise in three dimensions. Earlier research indicated that the author of SOSS recognised the underlying potential for human messenger activity in Ezekiel 1 and 10, and developed it further in the Seventh and Twelfth Songs.[23] The Seventh Song has a detailed description of the movement of the "living beings" (in their undertakings/missions). In the penultimate Twelfth Song messenger activity is even more explicit. The Twelfth Song was intended to be read on the Sabbath of the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) when the temple reading was Ezekiel 1 in combination with Exodus 21–22 (the giving of the law). The connections between Ezekiel 1 and the spirits serving the "King" in SOSS and the giving of the law to Moses at Sinai strongly suggests that the focus of attention in this text is on an activity that involves humans.[24]

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21 Lines 6–7a of Fragment 2 (Newsom 1998, 187, 188) confirm the likelihood that it is the humans, not angels, who are participants in the liturgy who negatively compare their own priesthood to the knowledge of the gods.

22 See Evans (2013; 2014).

23 Evans (2017, 652–58; 2018a, 2–8).

24 See, for instance, the exegesis of the Lindisfarne monks in the sixth century in the Lindisfarne gospels (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels).

The Plurality of the Ephodim

The striking mention in the plural of priestly *ephodim* in the final climactic Thirteenth Song implies that more than one priest was wearing *ephodim*. This appearance of *ephodim* makes a connection to Exodus, and thereby implies that the *ephodim* are to be worn by humans, not angels (Fletcher-Louis 2002, 282–86, 305, 360–61; 2017, 163, n. 60, 164). In the context of the light-giving stones of the *ephod*, the counterintuitive effect of the spirits clothed in garments of non-dimensional light rays (lines 7b–10) produces a fusion of the physical and ethereal state. Here at the very end of SOSS the divine knowledge is associated with the gemstones of the high priest's breastplate— what Fletcher-Louis (2002:387) calls "breastpiece" mysticism. The divine knowledge engraved onto the "people of discernment" in the introductory Song has become transformed in the Thirteenth Song into reflected light. The association of the light-giving *ephodim* dispensing knowledge supports the hypothesis of this article that it is the transformation and activity of humans worshipping that is being described in SOSS. They have been engraved as "holy to the Lord" by the King, as in Exodus 28:36. The climactic purpose of transformation of the participants in the liturgy is expressed in line 10: "These are the chiefs of those wondrously arrayed for service."[25] This is a telling affirmation of the transition from a centralised temple orientation to decentralised access to God's holiness through participation in ritual. The preconditions for such access, stated in the first, introductory Song, are repentance, purification, and holiness. It is God the King who initially bestows holiness upon those worshippers who draw near in order to gain access to divine knowledge.

Insights from Cognitive Neuroscience

Davila (2010, 440) considers the question of whether the sectarian participants believed that they were really ascending to heaven but recognises that the question of whether the liturgy involves some sort of mystical ascent is a "particularly difficult one." Scholars have warned about the pitfall of Eurocentrism when speaking of ascension experiences (Brueggemann 2002, 81; Czachesz 2017, 155, 156). The ambiguous quality of the text of SOSS does not allow an empirical interpretation of the metaphorical language into a literal description of ascent to heaven.

A decade ago, psychological diagnostic practice still considered altered states of consciousness (ASC) as pathological, but the identification of cross-cultural patterns resulted in a new wave of the study of religious experience. Cognitive neuroscience affirms that subjective religious experiences can be identified in the brain and motivate behaviour. The question of how physical processes in the brain give rise to subjective experiences has been approached in a variety of ways. At this stage the approach of Czachesz (2017, 144, 147, 155, 165) seems most applicable to SOSS because he claims

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25   The magnificent illuminations by the early medieval monks of Lindisfarne witness to a similar meaning in Ezekiel's vision (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels).

that religious experiences can arise under natural conditions without the intervention of external physical or supernatural stimuli.

To explain how perceptual transitions can arise through cognitive functioning in the brain, Czachesz (2017, 144–45, 160–64) explains the observable biochemical process that takes place in the brain when entheogens (chemicals such as LSD and psilocybin, which are known to facilitate religious experience) are introduced. When entheogenic substances enter the brain, they increase the secretion of dopamine in the central parts of the brain and reduce the secretion of serotonin. The receptor function of serotonin messengers is blocked by the excess dopamine. This results in a suspension of intentional states; activation of the dopaminergic neurons becomes unchecked, and elevated levels of dopamine produce pleasurable moods which can lead to hallucinatory experiences. Any information present in the brain goes through a sequence of transformations until it reaches the regions producing motor outputs that ultimately convey that information to the external world.

Czachesz (2017, 81) applies Boyer's (1994, 48; also see Boyer and Ramble 2001) concept of "minimally counterintuitive ideas" to explain how such "hallucinatory" experiences can arise under normal circumstances. This is the process that I propose is operative in SOSS. The author alerts his readers to the possibility of fluidity between the human participants and angelic beings by using (a) ambiguous terminology for divine beings, and (b) the application of minimally counterintuitive ideas. Boyer described minimally counterintuitive ideas which to some extent, but not too much, contradict accepted ontological categories, and in that way attract, or cause mental attention—"attention grabbing" (Czachesz 2017, 217). The resultant mental activity presumably causes chemical reactions in the brain similar to the dopamine reaction. One way to think about the subjective sense of transformation in the case of SOSS is to ask whether the author himself had had perceptual experiences of the kind which are described in the text. SOSS provides no clue in this respect, but Boyer's concept of "minimally counterintuitive ideas" is recognisable in the author's rhetorical techniques. For instance, in SOSS descriptions of such effects as animation of two-dimensional elements, and fluidity between two- and three-dimensionality (lines 2 and 5ff.) create a minimal counterintuitive impression in identity between the sectarians and spiritual divine/angelic beings. The deliberate ambiguity facilitates the desired impression of transition from human to divine categories.

The normal course of the biochemical changes in the brain described above would be that as the neurotransmitters begin to rebalance and the inhibition of the prefrontal cortex decreases, cognitive functions such as working memory and attention return, and a process of learning and insight takes place.[26] Such a process of a return to "normalcy"

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26 Czachesz (2017, 144) claims that even ancient descriptions of tours of heaven could have arisen under natural conditions without the intervention of external physical or supernatural stimuli. For instance, in the Ascension of Isaiah it seems as though Isaiah has left his body behind (7.5, 8.11, 14).

can be discerned in the closing lines of Song Thirteen: having gained "insightful knowledge," the chiefs of the praise offering bless the God of knowledge together with all his glorious works.

Conclusion

Newsom's English translation distinguishes between (a) animate architecture of the macrocosmic temple called "spirits"/*elohim*, (b) angels, and (c) sectarian participants/*elim*, but the latter are also sometimes designated as *elohim* in the Hebrew text. In the reduction which takes place during the execution of the liturgy from (a) three dimensions, through (b) two dimensional engravings, to (c) non-dimensionality, fluidity is the common denominator between categories (a), (b) and (c). By the end of the liturgy there is no distinction between the "spirits" and the participants in the liturgy, and "insightful knowledge" has been gained by the participants.

What is being described in the ending of SOSS in Song Thirteen is a transformation of Ezekiel's description of messenger activity in Ezekiel 1 to a reduction of human physical dimensions from three, through the two-dimensions of the engravings, to a non-dimensional state—a fusion of the physical to the spiritual—an ethereal transformation from normal cognition to a spiritual attainment of access to divinity for participants in the liturgy.[27] The plural form of the *ephodim* in the Thirteenth Song is a climactic expression of a united access to divinity.

In terms of cognitive neuroscience, these proposals go some way to explain how some mental representations can evoke religious meanings experienced as *felt* to be uniquely religious because they are connected to such representations in the brain. In a metaphorical sense the human participants do indeed become angelomorphic in that the text conveys that their corruptible three-dimensionality is transformed into an experience of a temporary transcendence into a purely spiritual state. Taking the characteristic ambiguity of Jewish angelology and the multivalent quality of poetry in general into account, specific distinctions between the active agents in SOSS are not possible, and not intended. The author of SOSS is concerned with rhetorical

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In the text, a strong light provides the clue that he is approaching the seventh heaven (8.21), but a voice identifies Isaiah as an intruder ("alien" in Ethiopic, "living in the flesh" in the Old Slavonic). In the end, when he is finally dismissed, Isaiah is told "thou will return into thy garment till thy days are fulfilled" (11.35). This is another ambiguous/fluid description that if his body has been discarded during his religious experience, it was as temporary "feeling," effected by a biochemical change in his "thinking." See Crick and Koch (2002, 94–95).

27 See the connection that Fletcher-Louis (2017, 142) makes here to "a vision of God, not on his throne, but in the human priesthood that to a degree now manifests the presence of the Glory of God of Ezek 1:26–28."

manipulation of the participant's "thinking" towards transformation into "feeling."[28] Hence the necessity for ingenious rhetorical devices such as describing the architectural aspects of the normally inanimate architecture of a temple as animate (Songs Seven, Twelve, and Thirteen). In this way the "minimal counterintuitive ideas" cause fluidity between elements of the description. In the same context the participants in the liturgy, whether angels or human, are "spirits"—they form the animate but non-dimensional structure of a spiritual temple. In Ezekiel's description of both the deity on the throne being attended by the living beings in Ezekiel 1 and 10, and his description of the eschatological temple itself (Ezekiel 40) it is impossible to mentally form a three-dimensional representation. That the participants in the liturgy experience the feeling of being transformed into spiritual beings is fully compliant with Boyer's cognitive neuroscience paradigm.

McGinn (1991, 22) recognised that late Second Temple Judaism created techniques to render the sacred texts of Israel "continuously alive for the believing community."[29] Collins (2011, 135) points out that the Scrolls shed light on the beginnings of Christianity because they emerged in the same cultural context. SOSS provides a link in that chain. It is Ezekiel's original merkabah vision which provided the metaphor for spiritual activity described in SOSS. Just as it is impossible to form a three-dimensional picture of Ezekiel's vision, so it is evident that we need to retain these mysterious metaphors in a fluid solution that can reach beyond our modernistic empirical tendencies so that they can flow with future scientific discoveries which are already overturning our fixed, logical expectations (Evans 2014, 146).

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28 Crick and Koch in 2002 proposed that a suspension of an intentional state can give rise to subjective experience which can result in meaning. Czachesz (2017, 144, 145) suggests that meaning derives from the halo of spreading activations across neighbouring networks in the brain as a result of "decentering" in neural processes. He refers to the neuroimaging studies conducted by Azari in which the feeling aspect of the religious experience was bound up with the thinking aspect. Azari and Birnbacher (2004) concluded that religious experience emerges as "thinking that feels like something."

29 For instance, the proto-mystical ascents to the vision of God found in the apocalypses.

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