

Religious Experience and Heavenly Cult in the Ascension of Isaiah



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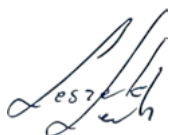
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Summary

This study aims to address a gap in Second Temple scholarship by examining how religious groups engage with the divine realm within this two-staged apocalypse, as conveyed by implied authors alongside implied readers and hearers. Indeed, the phenomenon of Isaiah's ascent (i.e., Ascls 6:10–12) and his celestial journey (i.e., Ascls 7:2–11:35), respectively described and narrated in stage one, occurs during collective prophetic liturgy and raises questions about the religious experiences of prophetic groups related to the Ascension of Isaiah.

In examining the religious experience in the Ascension of Isaiah, a range of interdisciplinary theories and methods employed by scholars exploring religious experiences in ancient literature are applied. To date, only brief comments have been made on the religious experience in this composition. While the task of addressing religious experience faces many obstacles, there should be little doubt that this is a topic shaping the Ascension of Isaiah, its readers and hearers, as well as the scribal traditions that transmitted it. Indeed, expressions of religious experience permeate the text. The findings of this study are significant for charting new pathways for adjudicating signs of religious experience, as reflected in the Ascension of Isaiah. To achieve this objective, this study is organised into six chapters, summarised as follows.

Chapters One and Two provide foundational insights for a thoughtful assessment of the Ascension of Isaiah. Chapter One, supported by interdisciplinary methods, posits hypotheses regarding religious experiences that may be induced by,

arise from, or be depicted in the text. It introduces the complex textual versions of the Ascension of Isaiah and, while focusing on the leitmotif of the apocalypse, demonstrates how religious experience is integral to its eschatological vision. The pseudepigraphy employed in the text serves as a means by which the authors and the community of prophets and interpreters self-identify and attribute their conceivable visionary experiences to the ancient hero. Chapter Two examines the components of ascent, heavenly cult, prophetic liturgy, and ecstatic prophecy in early Jewish and Christian literature, envisioning how external forces compelled the community and individuals of the apocalypse to experience the divine realm. This examination delves deeper into what can be explored about the religious experience from the text as drawn from the religious tradition of the period.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five examine signs of religious experience in the text. Chapter Three considers excerpts describing the liturgical-prophetic ceremony whose elements are rooted in the religious communitarian praxis of the period. The aim here is to demonstrate that passages 6:1–7:1 and 11:36–39 indicate liturgical events celebrated by the communities and individuals in the past in *communitas* with heavenly beings. It is argued that repetitive and performative practices of the liturgical-prophetic ritual led the ancient authors as well as readers/listeners of the visionary account of Isaiah to visionary experiences.

Chapter Four focuses on passages from the account of Isaiah's revelation and journey (7:2–11:35), which suggest otherworldly experiences as the product of processes occurring in or reflected by the body and behaviour of the visionary. The goal is to demonstrate that the narratives of Isaiah's journey in the sixth and seventh heaven (Chs. 8–9), when read and performed by a devotee, unveil processes activating

an alternate psychic state of the visionary. Attention is also given to the vivid and concrete language of these narratives, which are performed as embodied by the narratee and allow others to re-enact the narrator's experience. One conclusion reached is that the author of Ascls 6–11, through the literary resources of body language and emotion words, designs religious experiences to be engendered by readers and listeners of the composition.

Chapter Five explores the signs of ascents to heaven in passages in stage two (i.e., 2:9–11, 3:19 and 4:13). Here, the continuity of the liturgical-prophetic ritual and re-actualization of the narratives from Ascls 6–11 are demonstrated. In the entire writing of the Ascension of Isaiah, by which is meant the composition created by the second author who reused the visionary account of Isaiah, there are signs of repetitive and performative religious practices of ascension to heaven attributed to Isaiah. The second stage of the apocalypse is argued to be a reflex of the revelatory content of its previous stage, re-adapted and re-actualised through the immersive reading of the narratives from Ascls 6–11, which engendered further visionary experiences.

The research presented here addresses the central message of the Ascension of Isaiah. This message is transmitted orally and, embedded into this book, which was written in two stages, became the central thread uniting this composite work making it coherent. This composition is about Isaiah, who, surrounded by a group of devotees involved in a religious celebration, had a religious encounter. This central theme expresses the sensibility of its authors and, consequently, was found appealing to those who received it. As this study demonstrates, signs behind this message indicate a genuine religious experience of its authors and their precursors. The magnificence of Isaiah's account goes beyond the marvellous story about the ascended and

transformed human being meeting the divine. This research exhibits how the visionary account's numinous narratives are a script for its performance which might have stimulated devotees to re-enact the experience of Isaiah. This study seeks to demonstrate just how central the motif of the human encounter with the divine, attained through the liturgical-prophetic rituals in *communitas*, was for the authors of the apocalypse, its readers and listeners. It also might nurture questions about how vital the experiences of heavenly journeys and feelings of "oneness" with the divine were for the early Christians.

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I would also like to thank David Shepherd for his suggestions regarding my project, and Rodney Werline and our conversations about the place of religious experience in ancient literature. Their feedback played an important role in my initial pathways when laying the research framework of my thesis.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife,

Aida Liz,

and my son

Yannick Kuarahy

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Chapter One: The Ascension of Isaiah

The Introductory Aspects

1.1 Thesis and Arguments

Scholarship on the Ascension of Isaiah emphasises the importance of understanding its historical and literary aspects, as will be discussed below in this Chapter (cf. § 1.4). While explorations of historical and literary topics have not been exhausted, no scholar has considered how this composition may have been read and/or experienced by early Christian communities, and how it can be interpreted now from the phenomenological perspective of religious experience.

This study seeks to fill a gap in the Second Temple scholarship by providing a deeper understanding of how religious groups are compelled to experience the divine realm in the two-staged apocalypse of the Ascension of Isaiah. The point of departure for the thesis is found in the Ascension of Isaiah 6:10–12, where the description of Isaiah, the central character of the work, ascending to heaven is regarded as one of the finest accounts of ecstasy in ancient Jewish and Christian literature. Because this ecstatic phenomenon occurs during a collective prophetic liturgy, there is a growing

consensus among specialists that the text of the ascent in the Ascension of Isaiah refers to the performances of the prophets themselves.¹

To help us come closer to the religious experience of early Christian communities, I aim to understand how a sage recounting a journey conveys his account of the vision of the divine realm to listeners. Furthermore, I seek to comprehend how the visionary's report of participation in the heavenly cult of God influenced their communities, often composed of groups of prophets, in shaping their own religious experiences. The use of liturgy and prayer within the context of worship seems to have played a significant role, while the performance of hymns and songs appears to have invited and encouraged participation from others. Considering that a substantial portion of the text reflects a communion with angels during worship, I intend to explore the nature of these experiences and how they were nurtured.

The first-person singular pronoun in several passages is employed to report heavenly cultic visions, and the frequent recitation of liturgical fragments during earthly cultic events is noted. This suggests that these elements facilitated the experience of communion between those engaged in the cult and the angels. I seek to

¹ See especially Antonio Acerbi, *L'Ascensione di Isaia. Cristologia e profetismo in Siria nei primi decenni del II. Secolo*. Studia Patristica Mediolanensia, 17 (Milano: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1989), 217–253 and 269–282; Robert G. Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah: Community Situation, Date, and Place in Early Christianity”, *JBL* 109 (1990): 289–306; Robert G. Hall, “Isaiah's Ascent to See the Beloved: An Ancient Jewish Source for the *Ascension of Isaiah*?”, *JBL* 113, no. 3 (1994): 463–384, here 469 and 472; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1993), 87–89; Enrico Norelli, *L'Ascensione di Isaia. Studi su un apocrifo al crocevia dei cristianesimi*, Origini / Nuova Serie 1 (Bologna: EDB, 1994), 167–173, 235–248 and 271–275; Enrico Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae. Commentarius*. Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 36–66; Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, “The Ascension of Isaiah and the Johannist Constellation,” in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas, Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 199–234, here 216–217; Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, *From Jesus to his First Followers: Continuity and Discontinuity. Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 100–101. See also the section “Previous Scholarship” in this Chapter (1.4) below, note how this growing conviction among specialists is embraced by this study to establish the methodology, in the section “Addressing Religious Experience Phenomena” (1.5), and observe how it is examined in Chapter Three, entitled “Visionary Experience in the Course of the Prophetic Cult on Earth and in Heaven.”

comprehend how this experience of communion can be interpreted in light of the description of the sage's ecstatic experience and how the communion between the earthly community and celestial beings compels listeners and readers of the visionary narratives to encounter the divine realm.

This study seeks to demonstrate that the Ascension of Isaiah contains signs of religious experience phenomena which is (1) induced by the text, (2) lying behind or producing a text, or (3) described by a text. This thesis is based on several hypotheses argued in Chapters Three, Four and Five: first, Ascls 6–11 is the sign and image of liturgical events undertaken by the community of early Christians. Passages 6:1–7:1 and 11:36–39 indicate that the members of the prophetic circle celebrate the liturgical-prophetic events in *communitas*; second, the repetitive and performative celebrations of the prophetic ritual in *communitas* compelled the ancient authors and the prophetic circle behind the writing to the visionary experience and the encounter with the divine; third, the author of Ascls 6–11, with deliberate use of the literary resources such as body language and emotion words, designs religious experiences to be engendered by readers and listeners of the composition; fourth, the Ascension of Isaiah, a document which relaunches the visionary account of Isaiah 6–11, exhibits signs in Ascls 1–5 of repetitive and performative religious practices of ascension to heaven by its author and members of his community. Passages 2:9–11, 3:19, and 4:13 indicate that the prophets and interpreters re-experience the encounter with the divine from Ascls 6–11 and re-actualise its meaning for the new reality.

The following sections of the Chapter offer a description of the text, its date of composition, issues regarding various authors and pseudepigraphy, as well as the socio-historical context and provenance. I also summarise the significant aspects of previous

treatments of the Ascension of Isaiah, emphasising the interests and concerns raised in earlier scholarship. After providing a historical overview of the study of religious experience, I present a methodology that allows us to perceive and observe signs of religious experience in the text of this ancient work.

1.2 Text

As a composite writing consisting of two main parts, the Ascension of Isaiah provides two stories designed for different purposes.²

Ascls 6–11 is a journey into the visionary account of Isaiah. It begins with a vivid portrayal of the author's prophetic school (6:1–7:1). "Forty prophets and sons of the prophets" (6:3) gather in Jerusalem during the happier reign of king Hezekiah to receive Isaiah's vision of the coming of Christ (Ascls 7–11). Named prophets (6:9) and their apprentices (6:3) are here envisaged, and they are distinguished from "the officials, eunuchs and people" (6:3.7.14.17) who are outside. As a senior prophet, Isaiah conducts the prophetic school organised similarly to one of the lower five levels of heaven. They join their heavenly counterparts to worship exactly as the angels in the heavens (6:2–7). The phenomenon of ecstatic ascension, when the body of Isaiah remains on earth and his mind is taken to the heavens, takes place in the environment of the prophetic liturgy. Isaiah ascends to the seventh heaven, where he attends the heavenly cult conducted by two divine beings: the Holy Spirit, represented as an angel, and the Beloved One / the Lord, who is pre-existing Christ characterised as superior to

² Hall, "The Ascension of Isaiah", 289–306; Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish & Christian Apocalypses*, NovTSup 93 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 363–369 (Ch. 14: "The Ascension of Isaiah: Genre, Unity and Date"); Enrico Norelli, "L'Ascension d'Esaië est-elle vraiment un écrit unitaire ? Une discussion avec Richard Bauckham," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 32, no. 1 (2015): 11–37.

angels. The climax of the vision happens when Isaiah observes the future descent of the Beloved One in the world below, where he assumes a human aspect. Isaiah sees Christ's crucifixion by the earthly powers subjected to the "God of this world" and, afterwards, his descent into the kingdom of the dead. The Lord takes away the power of the rebellious angels who claimed to be masters of the world and, finally, rises back to the heavens to take his place on the throne at the right hand of God, while the Holy Spirit sits at the left. After Isaiah gives an account of the vision, the prophetic assembly continues worshipping.

Ascls 1–5, a masterpiece of apocalyptic literature, arouses the collective future eschatological hope in believers who were rejected by ecclesiastical authorities and harassed by false prophets. The author uses the traditional narrative model in which a false prophet incites an evil king to persecute a true prophet. The legend about the death of Isaiah, who would be sawed in two by the wicked king Manasseh, is incorporated into this story. The fictional setting is a prediction of the apostasy of Manasseh, the son of king Hezekiah, a friend of the prophet Isaiah who witnesses Isaiah's ecstatic experience described in Ascls 6–11. The story of Isaiah's confrontation with Hezekiah's son and the false prophet Belchira results in Isaiah's martyrdom (5:1–16). Belchira's anger is caused by the fact that, through Isaiah's vision of the descent and ascent of the Beloved recounted in Ascls 6–11, the prophet reveals that Sammael/Beliar, who inspired Manasseh to reject this vision, is an impostor in this world.

1.2.1 Date, Composition, and Eschatology

There is a growing consensus in the current scholarship on a two-stage composition theory of the apocalypse. Studies by Antonio Acerbi, Mauro Pesce, Robert G. Hall and Enrico Norrelli contribute to a unitary vision of the origins of the apocalypse. According to this theory, the visionary narrative (Ascls 6–11) was initially circulating orally, before being written in the late first century CE, as will be discussed below in this Chapter (cf. § 1.3). Jonathan Knight and Hall argue that the third-person narrative introduction (Ascls 6) may have been added to the first-person visionary material.³ The narrative material (Ascls 1–5) was subsequently added to the visionary account, and the entire composition (Ascls 1–11) was launched in the early second century.⁴ This relaunch, with added narrative material, was necessary to respond to the deteriorating situation in Christian communities (3:21–31), reaffirming and revitalising the posture developed in the visionary part.⁵ Currently, Norelli and Richard Bauckham are in dispute over the date of compositions. Bauckham suggests a provenance in 70–80 CE for the entire piece,⁶ while Norelli defends his hypothesis that a circle of prophets relaunched the visionary part of the entire composition, establishing its final

³ Jonathan Knight, “The Origin and Significance of the Angelomorphic Christology in the Ascension of Isaiah,” *JTS* 63 (2012): 66–105, here 70; Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah”, 290.

⁴ Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah”, 289–306; Enrico Norelli, *Ascension du prophète Isaïe*. Apocryphes: Collection de poche de l'Association pour l'Étude de la Littérature Apocryphe Chrétienne (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 74–78; Jonathan Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah. Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 21–23, 25–26; Jonathan Knight, “The Political Issue of the Ascension of Isaiah: A Response to Enrico Norelli,” *JSNT* 35, no 4 (2013): 355–379, here 357–358; Michael A. Knibb, “Isaianic Traditions in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah Vol. II*, ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans (Leiden/New York: Brill 1997), 636–650.

⁵ Acerbi, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 217–277.

⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 371–374; 381–390; Richard Bauckham, “How the Author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* Created its Cosmological Version of the Story of Jesus,” in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas, *Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha* 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 24.

redaction for 100 CE.⁷ This study aligns with the two-stage theory of the composition and with the date of the final redaction of the apocalypse. To aid understanding, hereafter, Ascls 6–11, as the visionary material of the Ascension of Isaiah, are designated “Ascls Part One”, and Ascls 1–5, as the narrative material of the Ascension of Isaiah, are designated “Ascls Part Two.”

The two-stage composition was created by different authors, as will be discussed in the following subsection (1.2.2), featuring different protagonists. The Ascension of Isaiah’s first-stage protagonists are prophets, including the prominent prophet, Isaiah. In the traditional literary subject of the conflict between true and false prophets, the author frames the confrontation between the prophetic group he belongs to and their adversaries. He perceives his context as a scene of intense contention between the group of prophets and false prophecy. There are several references to the group of visionaries associated with Isaiah, “the prophets who were with him” (3:1, 6–7; 5:13) in Ascls Part Two.⁸ This group of prophets was marginalised (3:27) by the corrupt ecclesiastical authorities, described as false prophets (3:21–31). The author highlights attitudes of false prophecy: the abandonment of the prophecy of the twelve apostles, internal divisions, corruption of the priests, withdrawal from following prophecies of the individuals in the past, and rejection of the vision of Isaiah. Thus, the story of Isaiah, who is persecuted and instigated by Belchira, establishes a model of the community of prophets, which opposes the church of elders and pastors.

⁷ Enrico Norelli, “L’Ascension d’Esaïe est-elle vraiment un écrit unitaire?”, 11–13; Norelli, *L’Ascensione di Isaia*, 59–67, 235–248; Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 30–66.

⁸ Among the prophets “who were with” Isaiah are those named, such as Jasub, Micah, Joel and Ananias (2:9; cf. 4:1; 6:7,17; 7:1; 8:24; 11:16), as well as a larger group (2:9–10), who shared with Isaiah an ascetic life in the wilderness (2:10–11).

Do authors of the two-stage apocalypse draw images of actual prophetic groups behind the apocalypse?

Hall's position is that there is a prophetic school gathering periodically from various early Christian communities behind Ascls Part One and Ascl Part Two. The prophetic guild appears in one section of Ascls Part One (6:4–17), where the author announces the arrival of “forty prophets” from the surrounding country, and three sections of Ascls Part Two (1:1–13; 2:7–11; 3:6–12), which echo Ascls 6. According to Hall, Isaiah conducts the prophetic school by imparting prophetic activities that aim to sharpen the prophetic practices of its adepts. The prophetic guild is organised similarly to one of the lower five levels of heaven, and this organisation is reflected in the setting of the prophets in the ceremony described in Ascls 6. This ceremony is structured around the prophets, who play a central role. They engage in worship, involving the angels in a manner that mirrors their own worship. The senior prophet's ascent to the seventh heaven is a significant event, building upon experiences of heavenly journeys that are open to all members of the prophetic guild. In Hall's opinion, the author of Ascls Part One uses the description of the prophetic group in Ascls 6 to convey his view of his own group. Similarly, the sections in Ascls Part Two, which echoes Ascls 6, also reflect the Ascls Part Two author's view of his own group. The second author, in contrast to the ideal portrait painted by the first author, depicts the marginalisation and reclusion of his prophetic group, which faces deterioration.⁹

⁹ Hall, “*The Ascension of Isaiah*”, 293–296.

As Hall's perspective shows the majority consensus on this issue, this study aligns with his position, particularly regarding the interpretation of the prophetic characters in the text.

Given that two stories were designed for different purposes in the two-staged apocalypse, questions about normative lines arise in the entire document.

The idea of an encounter with the divine, a transformative and life-altering experience, is a central theme in the Ascension of Isaiah. This concept is seen intrinsically and transmitted directly through the desire of the self-defined prophetic community to defend and authenticate their belief in experiences of heavenly ascent (2:9; 6:14). Moreover, the concept of meeting the divine also permeates stages of apocalyptic eschatology found in the writing. This concept, which regulates the beliefs and convictions of the community members, is not just a part of their life manifesto but a cornerstone. This manifesto expresses a firm opinion that God keeps everything in the universe under control now and in the future through Christ's heavenly nature and power, which defeats the rebel angels and effects redemption. How does this reconstitution of the world benefit the human experience of this new world?

The group of prophets lives the restored world order as a realised eschatology, and the details of this eschatology are transmitted through the vision received by their leader who ascended to heaven. A part of this redemptive plan consists of remaining in the Holy Spirit, which involves practices by prophets to receive revelations and transmit them to believers. In the middle of the narrative defending the pillars of the realised and future eschatology compared to "the teaching of the twelve apostles" (3:21), the author mentions the prophets' practices of receiving revelations "through the Holy Spirit" (3:19), which are then transmitted to believers through "vigorous words" (3:27).

Participation in the realised eschatology allows believers to receive heavenly robes, thrones, and crowns in the future. This *remaining in the Holy Spirit* is likely a response to a decline which motivated a further relaunch of the normative line from the visionary narrative set in a new context. Living within a realised eschatology does not mean there will be no Parousia, but this event does not have primary importance in the author's view. The devastating distance, which is intrinsic to the very constitution of the universe, with the diminution of glory in the direction of this world (7:26; 8:24), is overcome through the redemptive mission entrusted to and undertaken by the Lord. As a result of God's redemptive intervention, the possibility of meeting the divine is re-established. As such, this possibility is explored in the present religious experience of the heavenly journey of Isaiah (6:14).

In summary, the reconstitution of the world order transmitted in Ascls Part One is paired with a human experience of this new world order. The significant reduction of the distance between the divine and human realms is explored through the prophetic ritual in the liturgical assembly of the prophets. Because the Ascension of Isaiah is a composite of two parts that are woven into a unified whole, Ascls Part Two continues the normative line defined in the visionary narrative. The quintessence of this idea is that, by the redemptive mission of the Beloved, the distance between the human and divine realms is overtaken. The group of prophets lives the restored world order as a realised eschatology, receives revelations and transmits them to believers.

The following subsection focuses on identifying the authors of the apocalypse. This involves addressing the issue of pseudepigraphy. After reflecting on hints in specific passages of the apocalypse regarding the authors and considering theories on pseudepigraphy, the study ultimately underscores the group identity of the authors.

These authors, who align themselves with Isaiah, their ancient hero, seek to understand the heavenly realm.

1.2.2 Different Authors and Pseudepigraphy

The Ascension of Isaiah unveils the group of ancient Jews and Christians associated with the writing and committed to its normative line, whose essential part is to live the realised eschatology to be rewarded in the future. This commitment entails the conviction of the communities and individuals in the past to have knowledge of the revelation and their experiences of the divine realm. When the authors of the two-stage apocalypse compose narratives that disclose their literary characters' convictions and commitments, they claim to possess an authoritative and independent way of the central truth about the redemptive divine mission. While composing narratives and accounts of visionaries experiencing the divine realm, they are also conversant, or even experts, with visionary activity. However, the author of Ascls Part One and the author of Ascls Part Two are concealed in the pseudepigraphy and set their visionary activities in the context of the ancient Isaianic visionary tradition. What can be said about the identity of Isaiah in Ascls Part One and the identity of Isaiah in Ascls Part Two? Their identity relates to the sources generating the redemptive message.

The redemptive message, resulting from visionary practices, is embraced by the visionary circle. This circle is portrayed as the central and primary authority, integrated into their respective peripheral communities: "...there were forty prophets and sons of prophets they had come from the neighbouring villages (እምኢድያም – 'əmə'adayama), the mountains (ወእምኢድባር – wa'əmə'adabārə), and the countryside (ወእምኢሕቁል –

wa'əmə'aḥaqul) when they heard that Isaiah had come from Gilgal to Hezekiah" (6:3).¹⁰

They continue the rites observed by Jewish circles and practice ascent into the Merkavah (6:4–8). Their convictions and liturgical practices are so deeply embedded that one has to be in close contact with them to truly understand these practices, as noted in 6:14, Old-Slavonic translation: "And they all (въси – *vīsi*) thought (непѣшевах – *nepīshtevakh*) ['E': believed (ወአምሰ – *wa'amāsala*)] that Isaiah had been taken on high; the prophets understood (разумѣша – *razuměsha*) that [he] was in a revelation (іако въ явленіи въ – *iako vŭ iavlenii vŭ*) ['E': that holy Isaiah had been risen up (ዘተነሥ – *zatanaśə'a*)]".¹¹

The redemptive message, resulting from meditative practices, is received by a circle of interpreters. This circle is represented in the writing by the figure of king Hezekiah. Notably, *Ascls Part One* presents Hezekiah as one of the closest to Isaiah, his privileged interlocutor, and the hearer of his vision's story. He is even depicted as a character assisted by the Holy Spirit (6:3.6; 7:1; 8:24; 11:16). In 11:39–40, he appears in a certain way as the one who is responsible for the exegesis of the visionary content in the context of the prophecies contained in scripture. He is not alone in this task but is surrounded by three characters of the court, "Samnas the secretary, Jehoiakim, and Asaph the historian" (6:17), whom the Holy Spirit also assists.¹² Passages 6:17 and

¹⁰ While the issue of text versions is discussed in the following section (1.3), which also clarifies the preferences and reasons for their use in this study, I anticipate incorporating terms from these versions by including quotations supported by terms from the Ethiopic translation ('E') and the Old-Slavonic translation ('S') of the *Ascension of Isaiah* in this paragraph. For references to the quotations, see note 60 below.

¹¹ By prioritising the Slavonic translation over the Ethiopic, I emphasise the author's intention to convey that the ascension phenomenon attributed to Isaiah is comprehensible only to the prophets sitting next to the visionary. I also refrain from discussing the textual issues in this passage, which have been addressed by scholarship and summarised in Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 351–355.

¹² The designation of their names appears to be inspired by the following: Samnas is associated with Shebna (cf. 2 Kings 18:18; Isa 36:3), the king's secretary who is described as a "scribe"; Jehoiakim is identified with Eliakim (Isa 36:33.22; 2 Kings 18:18.26.37); the administrator who appears with Shebna

11:39–40 suggest that the interpretation of prophecies and tasks related to writing and editing are developed in a group of persons who work under someone’s leadership, as will be noted in Chapter Five below (cf. § 5.1.2). They seem to be part of the group of interpreters responsible for producing narratives in close cooperation with the prophetic circle. They also participate in public performances such as worship and liturgic celebrations, as the writing shows them as fellows sitting next to the prophets.¹³

Exegesis is not necessarily understood as finding meaning. From the point of view of the linguistic and cognitive science of religion, interpretation is a cognitive mechanism through which the hearer or reader is constantly creating meaning and construing knowledge. A significant part of this process is memory functioning, which involves actively looking in memory to find a suitable place for new data in the pre-existing system of collected and stored knowledge.¹⁴ As suggested in 11:39–40, this emphasis on memory for the constant creation of meaning and construing knowledge seems to have endorsed the reflection on the normative document in light of other prophecies and subsequent beliefs.

Given the above, two sources generating the redemptive message in Ascls Part Two should be considered: (1) the circle of prophets who obtain the knowledge of the

and Yoah; Asaph is regarded as the author of Psalms, which received a Christological interpretation that likely should have already been established; cf. also, Larry W. Hurtado, “Early Christological Interpretation of the Messianic Psalms,” *Salmanticense* 64, no. 1 (2017): 73–100.

¹³ Hezekiah’s role in interpreting and transmitting prophecies, along with his involvement in regulating the written text, is still better understood in Ascls 1–5.

¹⁴ Ilkka Eljas Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works. Towards a New Cognitive Science of Religion. Towards a New Cognitive Science of Religion* (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill, 2001), 33–44; Ilkka Eljas Pyysiäinen, “The Cognitive Science of Religion,” in *Evolution, Religion and Cognitive Science. Critical and Constructive Essays*, ed. Fraser Watts and Léon Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21–37, here 21–22; for the human ability to integrate various information from long-term memory to form concepts, see Robyn Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances. The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 321–333, esp. 322.

message through revelation, and (2) the circle of interpreters who reach the comprehension of the message through literary devices. It is hard to say if their visionary and interpretative activities were coordinated. However, from the setting of Ascls 6 and 11:39–40, some regulations, which enabled the believers to “understand” (11:40) the redemptive message, can be envisaged. The combination of visionary and exegetic activities, whose result is the revelatory message transmitted in Ascls Part Two, is endorsed by the visionary and revelatory experience of the divine realm. Both groups seem to claim that they have attained the divine realm and acquired knowledge pertaining to the redemptive mission, although they employ different means to achieve it.

In the pseudepigraphic scenario, when the author of the Ascls Part One and the author of the Ascls Part Two differ but are concealed under the pseudonymous name of Isaiah, the text unveils their connection to the circle of prophets and circle of interpreters, despite the narratives not relying on biographical information about the real author. For methodological purposes, I clarify that I use the term “implied author” to describe the entity that guides the “implied reader/hearer” in the story and that makes the narrative decisions.¹⁵ This study identifies the implied author as an entity placed between the real author and the narrator. While the implied author is the utterance placeholder for its meaning, the narrator brings forth the narrative report.¹⁶

¹⁵ For a historiography of Wayne C. Booth’s concept of the implied author and its reception in the academic study of literature, see Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, *The Implied Author*, Narratologia: Contributions to Narrative Theory 9 (Berlin/New York, NY: 2006). For narrative elements and the distinction between the real and implied author of a narrative in Biblical Studies, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?,” in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen Moore (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 23–49, esp. 26–36.

¹⁶ For the distinction between the implied author and the narrator, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Characters in Mark’s Story: Changing Perspectives on the Narrative Process,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner. Resources for Biblical Study 65

The implied author can be portrayed based on convictions, commitments, and religious claims observed in the narratives. While the actual author had a life, the implied author lives on as the projection of the text. The implied reader/hearer or the narratee is an entity placed to hear or read the narratives.

Because this study addresses a composite work, and the documents of this work are still prefixed to preexisting ones, it is necessary to clarify that there is a distinct and unique implied author, as well as a distinct and unique implied reader, for each consecutive stage of the work, including the pre-existing documents that sourced the work in its final version. The implied author is the idea of the author constructed by the reader or listener of the document, corresponding to the stage of its composition while they read or listen to the narrative.¹⁷

Each of the two authors of Ascls Part One and Ascls Part Two is aware of how redemptive communication has been reached as much as the authenticity of the message. He is the spokesperson for both circles that acquire the experience of the divine realm. He demonstrates that the circle of prophets claims a normative role in the community through the visionary experience. The author also shows that the circle of interpreters reaches the revelatory experience by explaining how the divine redemptive mission was revealed in already written and available prophetic material. Consequently, they explore their visionary praxis based on their exegesis of scripture and provide the material for the author to compose the normative and founding document.

(Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 45–69, here 68; Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, *The Implied Author. Concept and Controversy*. Narratologia: Contributions to Narrative Theory 9 (Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2006), 155–158.

¹⁷ H. Porter, Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 235.

Each of the two authors of the Ascls Part One and the Ascls Part Two applies the recourse of pseudonymity by attributing the main character of his writing to the portrayal of a hero from the past. The pseudonymous attribution to Isaiah from the past characterises the apocalypse as pseudepigrapha. According to John J. Collins, pseudonymous disguise was the norm among apocalyptic texts, rather than the exception.¹⁸ David Aune argues that an author applies pseudepigraphy because either the apocalyptic visionary may have visions from the figure to whom he attributes his work, and/or the writer may have identified with the past and written as his representative.¹⁹ Consequently, the revelation is bolstered by the authority of a hero from the ancient past²⁰ and legitimised through its extension to the ancient figure appealed for.²¹

Scholars observe that there is no single key to the issue of pseudepigraphy in apocalyptic texts.²² They argue that merely strengthening authority is one of the many purposes of using pseudepigraphy in the composition of apocalypses. Some propose that pseudepigraphy may lie at the core of religious experience. Michael E. Stone argues that in the background of the pseudepigraphic apocalyptic literature lie the authors' claims, and probably also a belief, that the norms and teachings they

¹⁸ John J. Collins, "Inspiration or Illusion. Biblical Theology and the Book of Daniel," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 29–38, here 30.

¹⁹ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 1983, 109–110.

²⁰ John J. Collins, "The Jewish Apocalypses," in *Semeia 14: Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 45.

²¹ Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Pseudepigraphy, Authorship, and the Reception of 'the Bible' in Late Antiquity," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11-13.10.2006*, ed. Lorenzo DiTomaso and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), 467–490, here 477–478.

²² For various purposes of the pseudepigraphy used in antiquity, see John J. Collins, *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 2015), 219–250; and in the Second Temple period: Vicente Dobroruka, *Second Temple-Pseudepigraphy. A Cross-cultural Comparison of Apocalyptic Texts and Related Jewish Literature*, Ekstasis 4 (Berlin / Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2013), 13–33.

disseminated originated in the divine realm. He affirms the association between religious experience and certain pseudepigraphic apocalypses, and suggests that pseudepigraphy might serve as a means to validate actual experiences.²³ Christopher Rowland, drawing on the work of Johannes Lindblom, suggests that the root of the apocalyptic pseudonymity is the psychology of visionary experience. He observes in visionary literature of diverse origins the tendency of scribes and writers involved in creating the text to be identified with their mythical heroes to the extent that they may have thought they were indeed the latter.²⁴ Collins sees apocalyptic pseudepigraphy as a result of “the intense and emotional experience of the visionary” rather than a calculated deception by the author. He adduces examples of (1) Enochic visionaries who “mentally” reproduced Enoch’s ascent to the heavens, and (2) the visionary identified with Daniel who, in the Maccabean period, saw history through Daniel’s eyes.²⁵ Daniel Frankfurter proposes to consider anchorites’ identifications with Elijah and the prophetic claims that arose in some hermits due to reading and performing the Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah. In his view, it is conceivable that the author of the apocalypse had faith that he was “transmitting” the words of the ascended prophet on Horeb.²⁶

David S. Russell argues that pseudonymity in Jewish apocalyptic literature indicates an essential affinity between the author of an apocalypse and the ancient

²³ Michael E. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha: With Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition*, SVTP (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 419–428 (“Apocalyptic – vision or hallucination?”); Michael E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 2011), 116; Michael E. Stone, “Pseudepigraphy Reconsidered,” *RRJ* 9 (2006): 1–15, esp. 12, as well note 199.

²⁴ Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic In Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982), 243. For psychologically significant details in apocalyptic visions, see Merkur, “The Visionary Practices”, 120–121.

²⁵ Collins, “Inspiration or Illusion”, 31–33.

²⁶ Daniel Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt: The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 58–78, esp. 77–76.

hero.²⁷ This affinity, described as “a quasi-mystical union” between an author of apocalypse and his mentor, separated by a significant distance in time, arises from commonalities shared by two individuals in different occurrences in time and space. Russell identifies such a phenomenon as a tradition denominated “corporate unity”. Members of a group from a particular time cultivate a close relationship with individual lives from the past and extend this unity to future members. Consequently, they regard themselves as a single individual. The authors of apocalypses consider themselves in this tradition to be inheritors of the ancient heroes, such as Enoch, Moses and Ezra, and write their works as representatives of the seer himself. Russell claims that the apocalypticists’ feeling of kinship with a hero in whose name they wrote would be accentuated if their accounts reflected actual visionary experiences. In summary, in Russell’s view, tradition and inspiration are the reasons for the pseudonymity applied in apocalyptic writings. Although his theory cannot be proven and is criticised for assuming the distinctiveness of the Hebrew mentality of corporate personality and sense of contemporaneity, voices defending the essentials of Russell’s theory, that religious experiences are enshrined in the apocalypses, should be heard.²⁸

Scholem’s argument for continuity between the apocalyptic and the Merkavah mystics, and his postulation that the visions of the apocalypses represent the actual experiences of their authors are of significant interest to our study. He suggests that these experiences were reached in a manner similar to the later Merkavah mystics. In his view, when the author describes the ascent, he is actually recounting his own experience under the guise of an ancient hero’s name.²⁹

²⁷ Russell, *The Method and Message*, 127–139, esp. 132–134; Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, 65–69.

²⁸ Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 66; Stone, *Ancient Judaism*, 116.

²⁹ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Schocken, 1961), 43.

In light of the above views, this study will suffice to apply two concepts of pseudepigraphy. Firstly, one can plausibly argue that the authors of the Ascension of Isaiah appeal to the expedient of choosing the putative name for the main character of the writing to strengthen the authority of that character of the visionary account and revelatory content he received.³⁰ It is not difficult to understand why someone would look to Isaiah as a source of revelation. The claims to the authority of the prophet Isaiah, who ascended to heaven and saw God, are visible in numerous references to the book of Isaiah. The rationale for applying pseudepigraphical resources in the apocalypse is to recall the claims of the religious traditions associated with Enoch or Baruch (Gen 5:22-24). The authors of these traditions used the belief in Enoch's ascension to heaven and his life associated with the angels, as well as the conviction that at the end of his earthly life, he was taken up to heaven by God, to provide an aura of antiquity and participation in a tradition of great status and authority.³¹ Similarly, through the traditions concerning the prophet Isaiah, the visionary in our writing benefitted from the authority and status of the experiences of the visionary hero who saw God. Furthermore, the audience of the new pseudepigraphon, which predicates the divine mission with its results to be lived contemporaneously, readily accepts its claim when drawn on the earlier tradition.

³⁰ James Charlesworth, "Pseudepigrapha," in *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, Vol. 2, ed. Everett Ferguson, Michael A. P. McHugh, and Frederick A. W. Norris (New York, NY: Garland, 1999), 961. Charlesworth classifies the Ascension of Isaiah as the Christian writing that attributes its name to an Old Testament personality.

³¹ For the figure of Enoch and its connections to Mesopotamia, see James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*, CBQMS 16 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984), 33–51; James VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 6–8.

Apart from the investment of the visionary's words and vision with the authority of antiquity, the identification of the prophets and interpreters with their ancient hero is the second objective of the pseudepigraphy in the apocalypse, as applied by this study. Because the Ascension of Isaiah shows strong similarity to the visions of the heavenly chariot, reported in rabbinic literature and the Hekhalot texts, as will be observed in Chapter Two (cf. § 2.1), we align with Scholem's position. He posits that when the apocalyptic author describes the ascent, he describes his own experience under someone else's name, as noted above. Therefore, we claim that the authors of Ascls Part One and Ascls Part Two are distinct yet concealed under the pseudonymous name of Isaiah. Such an identification implies a cognitive process that enables the prophets and interpreters to perceive themselves as the prophet Isaiah. They were immersed in the tradition of "corporate unity" and, as representatives of the prophet Isaiah, acted as his spokesmen, justifiably assuming his name. Through prayer, fasting, and ecstatic exercises, they activated a cognitive process that allowed them to perceive themselves as the prophet Isaiah and believe they were "channelling" his words.

The text of the visionary account 6:14 suggests that prophets who join the assembly and perform the prophetic liturgy understand the somatic-behavioural changes of the visionary, as noted above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.2.2). Their reaction of "recognition" of the seer's state and "understanding" it (6:14) implies that the prophetic liturgy, culminating in an ecstatic event, does not simply describe a singular occurrence. The detailed description of the prophetic ceremony appears to be connected to the religious experience of the prophetic group members as they reference their performances. While participating in the prophetic liturgy, readers and

listeners of the pseudepigraphic visionary experience identified so closely with their mythical hero that they believed they were him. This identification with the ancient Isaiah occurred among prophetic circles during the oral stage of the visionary account of the apocalypse and continued after its written form was completed.

The following two sections on the topic of pseudepigraphy identify the readers and listeners who benefit from Isaiah's prophetic and visionary authority and are encouraged to connect with the ancient hero. They also reveal the authors' strategies to compel them to adhere to the realised eschatology.

Isaiah in Ascls Part Two

As noted earlier, the concept of Isaiah as a visionary stems from the tradition that the prophet Isaiah encountered God. Consequently, Isaiah's role in the account of Isaiah's vision of the Beloved and the Church (3:13–4:22) is rooted in the idea that he was a visionary. This understanding derives from the Book of Isaiah (Isa 6). Numerous references to this literary source indicate that the implied author of Ascls Part Two aims to attribute the authority and traditional status of the prophet from the Book of Isaiah to the prophet from his writing. Similarly, the author upholds the authority of Isaiah based on the Jewish traditions that underpin the martyrdom of the prophet Isaiah.

Meghan Henning and Tobias Nicklas define characteristics of religious groups that may have been addressed by or self-understood with the main protagonist of the writing. According to scholars, the real identity of the protagonist, concealed behind the pseudepigraphic character of the text, might be understood as a corporate identity, such as the Community of the Righteous or the Community of Angel-Like Saints.

Alternatively, Henning and Nicklas envisage the Community Surrounding Some Prophetic Scribes and Mystics behind the text.³² These insights into the group's self-understanding are supported by interpretations of selected passages from the entire writing, which appear to provide ideas for identifying the group behind those portrayed as the singular hero of the Ascension of Isaiah.

Accordingly, this study considers the prophet Isaiah, portrayed as the ancient hero in the Ascension of Isaiah, as a pseudonymous figure embodying group identity. The group likely comprises interpreters and scribes (1:2b–6a; 6:16–17; 11:39–40) closely connected to the visionary circle of prophets (2:9–10; 3:10, 31; 4:22; 6:1–16) who practice ascension to heaven. While interpreting the legacy from the visionary narrative in light of their hero's prophecies, the scribes and writers self-identify themselves with the prophet Isaiah, considered by early Christians as one of the most important prophets of Christ. The new meanings and knowledge created by the exegesis of the book of Isaiah signpost this identification.³³ Throughout the process of interpretation, the scribes and interpreters reach a revelatory experience that allows them to claim to have attained the divine realm. By interpreting and disclosing the redemptive mission of the Beloved, in light of their hero's prophecies, they claim to be a part of the group of an elite, the "Righteous" (2:5), who possess access to the secret revelations of the prophet Isaiah.

This group constitutes the implied readers and listeners of the story about Isaiah, who is persecuted and executed, and identifies with this main character. The

³² Meghan Henning and Tobias Nicklas, "Questions of Self-Designation in the Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 179–194.

³³ Knibb, "Isaianic Traditions", 639–645.

group is designated as “many believers” (2:9), “many who believe in him” (3:19), “numerous believers and saints” (4:13) and prophets (2:9–10; 3:31; 5:13). They understand the legacy from Ascls Part One, are invited to engage in withdrawing with Isaiah, “living on the mountains” (2:9), and being a part of the “Righteous”. For the reader from a Jewish background, “the mountain” is where leaders of the people of God meet the divine. Because the author knows the past, present and future, they trust him when “they flee from desert to desert and await the arrival of the Beloved” (4:13) and believe that what he indicates will be fulfilled: “they will speak in the Holy Spirit and many signs and wonders will take place in those days” (3:20). While in the narrative about Isaiah’s execution (5:13), the readers and listeners accompany him, they are invited to observe, listen to and admire him when “he was sawed in half” and “spoke with the Holy Spirit” (5:14). In such a way the implied author compels the implied readers and listeners to participate in the realised eschatology, to remain in the Holy Spirit to receive heavenly robes, thrones, and crowns in the future.

Isaiah in Ascls Part One

This section proposes a source in the Merkavah tradition, which founded oral traditions and subsequently inspired the author to compose Ascls Part One around Isaiah, the ancient visionary hero. Convictions, commitments, and religious claims, closely related to Merkavah mysticism, shape the actions of the readers and listeners of the narrative who engage in the liturgical-prophetic ceremony, as will be observed in Chapter Two (cf. § 2.1). The self-identification of the narratees with Isaiah, the central character of the story, allows them to participate in his conceivable encounter with the divine.

Ascls Part One has little in the text based on the book of Isaiah.³⁴ Noteworthy, while establishing the link between Ascls 3:13–4:22 and the Book of Isaiah (Isa 6), scholars cannot do the same with the visionary narrative, Ascls 6–11. The circumstances of the vision of the visionary narrative differ from those of Isaiah 6.³⁵ While in Ascls Part Two, the attribution to Isaiah, seen in early Christianity as a mighty prophet of Christ, certifies that the redemptive mission of the Beloved is authentic, Ascls Part One lacks attribution to the prophecy of Isaiah. The only exception is Isa 57:15 (LXX), which appears in Ascls 6:8, 7:17, and 10:6 to support the liturgical character of the assembly and to suggest the continuity between the earthly praise of the prophets and the heavenly singing of the angels. This raises the question of whether the author of Ascls Part One draws from other literary traditions to associate the principal visionary and prophetic protagonist with some hero.

While the Christian authorship of the visionary narrative is now recognised, as will be observed below in this Chapter (cf. § 1.3), Scholem argues that the Ascension of Isaiah has its roots in a Jewish text. He maintains that the concept of the seven heavens, through which the soul ascends to its original home, whether in death or in a state of ecstasy while the body remains alive, is undeniably ancient. In a somewhat obscure and distorted form, this idea is already present in early apocryphal works, such as the Fourth Book of Ezra and the Ascension of Isaiah, which is based on a Jewish text.³⁶ Martha Himmelfarb also believes that this Christian work is based on a Jewish

³⁴ Hall, *"The Ascension of Isaiah"*, 291. Hall notices that 7:1–11:35 "bears no essential connection with Isaiah".

³⁵ Knibb, *"Isaianic Traditions"*, 646.

³⁶ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 54. Scholem references the introduction to Charles' translation of the Ascension of Isaiah (1919) by G. H. Box. Although this introduction does not provide arguments, it suggests the Jewish background of the seven heavens concept in the Ascension of Isaiah.

apocalypse involving Isaiah's ascent to heaven.³⁷ She highlights a shared interest in "tours of hell" that is common to both Jewish and Christian apocalypses. Indeed, when composing the visionary narrative (probably early in the first century CE), any sharp distinction between Christian and Jewish apocalypses was artificial, as observed below in this Chapter (cf. § 1.3).

Himmelfarb points out that, in these works, the visionaries' tours of hell, usually guided by an angel, are structured through demonstrative explanations.³⁸ This resource assisted authors of apocalypses in situating the texts within tradition. Thus, alongside Hebrew Texts presenting Jewish tours of hell and heaven, such as the Isaiah Fragment, the Joshua B. Levi Fragment, and *Gedulat Moshe*, these literary expedients were used in tour apocalypses such as 2 Enoch, 3 Baruch and the Ascension of Isaiah, which have special ties to the Book of Watchers. Ascls Part One contains six demonstrative explanations provided by the visionary, each preceded by questions to his guide. This discovery allows Himmelfarb to firmly position the earliest part of the Ascension of Isaiah within the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic literature, despite its distinctly Christian content, and to align it closely with the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, which also shares a focus on tours of hell and the ascents. The visionary narrative of our writing demonstrates common motifs with the Testament of Levi, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and 2 Enoch, which do not feature such demonstrative explanations.³⁹

³⁷ Martha Himmelfarb, "The Experience of the Visionary and Genre in the Ascension of Isaiah 6–11 and the Apocalypse of Paul," in *Semeia 36: Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, ed. Adela Y. Collins (Decatur, GA: Scholars, 1986), 98.

³⁸ For the resource of demonstrative explanations, particularly common phrases, such as "these are those who..." or simply "these...", as well as questions and answers using demonstratives "who are these?" "these are they who...", or "these who are..." see, Marta Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell. An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania 1983), 45.

³⁹ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 65. Himmelfarb lists the following elements: "an ascent through seven heavens, angels as the contents of the heavens, angelic crowns, angelic hymns, the visionary's mistaking an angel for God, danger to the visionary during the ascent, the vision of the throne of God."

These and other observations lead Himmelfarb to argue that the “Jewish Isaianic tour that included hell” may have been the origin of the Ascension of Isaiah.⁴⁰ She postulates the existence of an Isaiah apocalypse, a Jewish apocalypse transmitted in Hebrew, of which a remnant is the *Isaiah Fragment*. Such an Isaianic tour apocalypse would still exist before the breakdown of the tour apocalypses into writings with tours of seven heavens and compositions with tours of hell. This claim can also be articulated in the context of Scholem’s firm conviction in the “unbroken line of development” between pre-rabbinic visionary literature, some of the early apocalypses, some of the literature from Qumran, the Merkavah mysticism, and Hekhalot compositions.

Beyond the significance of the Jewish background and its substantial influence on the evolution of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses, Himmelfarb’s theory proposes that the hero of the prophetic circle is the central figure in *Ascls Part One*. While the Jewish Isaianic apocalypse theory suggests that it would encompass a journey to heaven and a tour to hell, our writing includes no scenes of reward or punishment, only angels and the Beloved. This implies that the author of *Ascls Part One* did not rely on the Isaianic Fragment to choose Isaiah as the primary character of his work.

At this point, however, to establish the connection between *Ascls Part One* and the hero emerging from the Jewish Isaianic apocalypse, it is necessary to follow the marks outlined by Scholem.⁴¹ He elucidates the origins of Jewish mysticism and the general features of the “pupils of Yohanan ben Zakkai” as representatives of mystical and theosophical thought among the teachers of the Mishnah. In small visionary circles, ancient authors convey elements of their new religious convictions, laying the

⁴⁰ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 136–137.

⁴¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 40–44.

groundwork for new literature. They operate under the names of their instructors and incorporate into their writings the authentic individuals who are the figures of the visionary action. This visionary group also influenced the production of a significant number of apocalypses from the first centuries BCE and CE, whose protagonists experience ascents to seven heavens and are identified with ancient heroes.⁴² It is entirely plausible to propose that the experiences of the writers guided by the early Tannaim, such as Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and the four sages who entered the *Pardes*, laid the groundwork for the Jewish Isaianic journey claimed by Himmelfarb.

Therefore, based on Henning and Nicklas's theory and in light of the thesis on the Jewish Isaianic tour apocalypse, I propose that the figure of the prophet Isaiah, portrayed as the hero in *Ascls Part One*, involves group identity. The visionary circle of prophets (6:3–6) integrated the group, closely related to interpreters and scribes (6:16–17; 11:39–40). These scribes preserved essential elements of the spiritual tradition of the visionary doctrine inherited from the circles of the early Tannaim. The members of the prophetic guild constitute the implied readers and listeners of the story about the collective liturgical-prophetic ceremony during which the main prophet is supposed to have experienced the celestial journey represented as an ecstatic experience. The implied readers and listeners had a self-understanding tied to Isaiah from the Jewish Isaianic tour apocalypse. The members of this prophetic guild claim (1) their participation in the divine council (6:1),⁴³ (2) having been taken and guided by the

⁴² Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 2nd ed. AGJU 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 85–90. Gruenwald identifies here 2 Enoch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Ascension of Isaiah, Greek Baruch, Apocalypse of Zephaniah.

⁴³ It evokes the divine council setting found in Isa 6 and 1 Kings 22. Additionally, it is embedded in the vision of God enthroned in Ezek 1 and 8–11.

glorious angel (7:2),⁴⁴ (3) having been granted the vision of God's throne-chariot linked to special garments and crowns as the reward promised for the righteous (8:26; 9:10–13), and (4) having achieved a status even higher than the angels (9:31–39).⁴⁵ These claims also suggest that the implied author recognises an affinity between the narratees and devotees of the Merkavah visionary circles. The stage of redaction of the visionary account undertaken by the writer was likely anticipated during the phase of visionary religious experiences attributed to the hero of the Jewish Isaianic tour apocalypse.

In summary, the author of *Ascls* Part One employs the resource of pseudepigraphy to reinforce the intimate nature of the visionary experience attained by the prophetic guild, namely the implied readers and listeners of the visionary narrative. The implied author connects their experiences with Isaiah, the hero from the Jewish Isaianic tour apocalypse. A range of elements from Merkavah mysticism illustrates that the visionary account of the prophets is deeply intertwined with their mythical hero, bequeathing patterns of mysticism inherited from the circles of the early Tannaim. The group of interpreters and scribes involved in the creation of the text drew upon both oral and written Christian traditions, embedding them within a framework of literary elements rooted in the patterns of early Jewish visionary experience. Both groups are attributed to Isaiah, the hero from the Jewish Isaianic tour apocalypse.

The author of *Ascls* Part Two employs the means of pseudepigraphy to legitimise and deeply connect the revelatory experiences of the group of interpreters

⁴⁴ It likely refers to Isaiah of Jerusalem's vision of the divine council in session within the temple (Isa 6:1–2; 6–7).

⁴⁵ An angelological interest of the writing is closely related to the Testament of Levi and the Apocalypse of Abraham, both apocalypses that contain elements of heavenly journeys, as well as 2 Enoch.

and scribes closely associated with the visionary circle of prophets. Interpreters, scribes, and prophets, referred to in the narrative as believers and saints, are the implied readers and listeners of the story about Isaiah, who faces persecution and execution. The author attributes both groups to the prophet Isaiah, their hero, whom early Christians regard as one of Christ's most important prophets. The textual evidence of new meanings, produced through creative exegesis on fragments from the book of Isaiah, indicates that scribes and interpreters identify with the prophet Isaiah throughout their interpretations of the prophecies. This identification was endorsed during the process of textualisation undertaken by the writer, as will be elucidated in this Chapter (cf. § 1.5). Thus, the normative strand regarding the redemptive intervention of God, as revealed in the visionary account, is also certified and legitimised for application in the new context of a conflict with other groups of "followers of Christ."

After presenting the details about the text and identifying its authors, readers, and listeners, we turn to the socio-historical context and provenance of the apocalypse. Understanding these aspects of the two-stage apocalypse is vital for envisioning and recognising the signs of the religious experiences of its authors, readers, and listeners.

1.3 Socio-Historical Context, Textual Provenance, and Versions

Most scholars agree that the Ascension of Isaiah was composed in Antioch, or the western part of Syria. Hall argues that the social-historical milieu of Ignatius of Antioch, along with the correlations between the apocalypse and certain Christian writings, particularly the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch, suggest Syria at the end of the

first century or, more likely, the beginning of the second century CE as the origin of the entire composition.⁴⁶ Frankfurter recalls studies on Ignatius' Epistles to the Anatolian churches (Ign. Eph., Ign. Phld., Trallians), which indicate that prophetic charisma is essential factor for religious leadership within these Christian communities. Furthermore, he cites textual evidence from the early second-century Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Timothy, Titus), emphasising a significant polemic against an ascetic and anti-hierarchical movement. These insights suggest a division among early Christians and, in his view, a new religious situation of a "New Prophecy" emerging within the Christian movement in Asia Minor. This religious context seems to provide the backdrop for the Ascension of Isaiah.⁴⁷

Norelli supports the perspective that, in his Epistles, Ignatius addresses the tendencies of Docetism, Judaizers, and charismatics who are reluctant to submit to the bishop. Ignatius' writings and the Ascension of Isaiah reflect two opposing trends during an extended process in which episcopal authority, within the Syrian environment, gradually established itself by suppressing charismatic groups. While, in the early decades of the second century CE, Ignatius affirms a community founded on a bishop, presbyters, and deacons, Ascls 3 mentions a Church structure based on a bishop and presbyters. This suggests that the structure acknowledged by Ignatius could have been implemented and consolidated in a phase following that evidenced by the Ascension of Isaiah.⁴⁸ According to Norelli, several elements indicate the Antiochian

⁴⁶ Hall, "The Ascension of Isaiah", 305–306; Christine Trevett, "Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism: Seeking the Seeds," VC 43, no. 4 (1989): 313–338. Among Christian works in correlation with the Ascension of Isaiah are the Gospel and Epistles of John, Revelation of John, and Odes of Solomon.

⁴⁷ David Frankfurter, "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Van Gorcum / Assen / Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 129–200, here 131–133.

⁴⁸ Norelli, *Ascension du prophète*, 75–76, 95–99; Norelli, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 271–276.

origin of the Ascension of Isaiah: 1) the early phase of divergences between prophetic groups and the structured Church, as observed in Ascls Part Two; 2) a compound of theological themes common to the Ascension of Isaiah, Didache, and the Gospel of Matthew; and 3) theological concepts familiar to the apocalypse and Greek-speaking Jews, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and whose mission extends from Jerusalem.⁴⁹

In light of the above insights, this study aligns with the Antiochene provenance of the apocalypse.

The Ascension of Isaiah is a composite document classified as an apocalypse that combines narrative and visionary material. It was produced in close association with Jewish circles interested in mysticism. Ascls Part One belongs to a group of compositions noted for their otherworldly journeys and cosmic and/or political eschatology.⁵⁰ The entire apocalypse, namely its narrative section, Ascls Part Two, also known as the Martyrdom of Isaiah, and Ascls Part One, also referred to as the Vision of Isaiah, was once identified as a document of Jewish provenance.⁵¹

Although this study addresses the Ascension of Isaiah as a written text, it is essential to remember the widely accepted thesis that the material in Ascls 7–11 initially circulated orally, as was mentioned above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.2.1). Italian scholars observe that the traditions within Isaiah's document integrate Christian eschatological prophecy, knowledge of Jewish visionary traditions, and Hebrew scriptures. The visionary account

⁴⁹ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 53–66.

⁵⁰ John J. Collins, "Introduction. Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in *Semeia 14: Apocalypse. Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins (Missoula, Scholars Press, 1979), 1–20, here 13–14.

⁵¹ Robert H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah Translated From the Ethiopic Version, Which Together with the New Greek Fragment, the Latin Versions and the Latin Translation of the Slavonic Is Here Published in Full* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1900), xxxvi–xliii; David Flusser, "The Apocryphal Book of *Ascensio Isaie* and the Dead Sea Scrolls," *IEJ* 3, no. 1 (1953): 34–47; Marc Philonenko, "Martyre d'Ésaïe et l'histoire de la secte de Qumran," in *Pseudépigraphes de l'Ancien Testament et manuscrits de la Mer Morte*, ed. Marc Philonenko, J.-C. Picard, J.-M. Rosenstiehl and F. Schmidt, Cahiers de la RHP 41 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967), 1–10; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 96–101.

of Isaiah presents itself as an amalgamation of ideas and images derived from inherited traditions, reworked according to theological interests. Nonetheless, Ascls 7–11 does not provide a statement attributable purely and simply to Jewish or Christian thought. This scenario suggests that the authors of the Greek original were more likely to have drawn on oral tradition rather than on any written document.⁵² Jonathan Knight accepts this theory, noting an evolving perspective that Isaiah's visionary account is better understood as a new composition formed from diverse oral sources alongside knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures.⁵³ Furthermore, Knight hypothesises that the material corresponding to Ascls 7–11, prior to its redaction, had been used in the public liturgy of the Antiochene Church.

The apocalypse, once thought to have Jewish origins, has undergone a significant shift in scholarly interpretation. Contemporary studies of the Ascension of Isaiah have rejected the source-critical interpretation that sought to establish its Jewish redaction.⁵⁴ It is now widely accepted that both sections of the apocalypse (Ascls Part One and Ascls Part Two) were authored by Christian authors, thus eliminating the need for source criticism.⁵⁵ Furthermore, scholars argue that the blurred lines between the pre-Christian Jewish materials and the appropriated and reworked Christian iterations

⁵² Mauro Pesce, "Presupposti per l'utilizzazione storica dell'Ascensione di Isaia. Formazione e tradizione del testo: genere letterario: cosmologia angelica," in *Isaia, il Diletto e la chiesa: Visione ed esegesi profetica cristiano-primitiva nell'Ascensione di Isaia. Atti del convegno di Roma, 9-10 aprile 1981*, ed. Mauro Pesce, TRSR 20 (Brescia: Paideia, 1983), 13–76. Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 9–66; Acerbi, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 289–291.

⁵³ Jonathan Knight, "The Political Issue of the Ascension of Isaiah", 357–358, and note 8; cf. also Acerbi, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 279–282.

⁵⁴ For studies that support the unitary character of the Ascension of Isaiah, see Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 31–33, note 3.

⁵⁵ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 40–44. Cf. also Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 363–369 (Ch. 14: "The Ascension of Isaiah: Genre, Unity and Date").

make it difficult to distinguish the original from the newer material.⁵⁶ Scholars widely and conclusively regard the apocalypse as a Christian work, a consensus that this study upholds.⁵⁷

The issue of versions and what is known about the earliest versions is a crucial starting point for any study of Isaiah's Ascension. Different versions of the Ascension of Isaiah are transmitted in several languages. These various textual forms result from a series of modifications or conscious innovations made within the traditions of each cultural and religious circle responsible for the introduced changes.

The complete text of the work is provided by the version in Classical Ethiopic translation (i.e., Ge'ez), denoted here as 'E', and is based on ten manuscripts. Two fragments of a Latin version, referred to here as 'L¹', contain sections 2:14–3:13 and 7:1–9, preserved in a palimpsest (codex *Vat. lat. 5750*). Two Coptic translations preserve the entire writing, although they are highly incomplete. The manuscript in the Sub-Akhmimic dialect, denoted here as 'C^{akh}', consists of four fragments alongside others that are lost.⁵⁸ It preserves the following passages: 1:1–5; 3:25–28; 5:7–8; 6:7–11; 7:10–15, 28–32; 8:16–17; 9:9–11, 28–30; 10:9–11.27; 11:14–16, 35–37. The manuscript in the Sahidic dialect comprises two fragments, referred to here as 'C^{sah}', preserving passages 3:3–6, 9–12; 11:24–32, 35–50.⁵⁹ Two translations provide the

⁵⁶ Robert A. Kraft, *Exploring the Scriptures: Jewish Texts and their Christian Contexts* (Leiden: Brill 2009), 44–46.

⁵⁷ John J. Collins, "The Jewish Apocalypses", 43–44; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," in *Semeia* 14, ed. John J. Collins (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 61–122, here 84–85; Himmelfarb, "The Experience of the Visionary and Genre", 97–111; Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York, NY / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 55–58; Mauro Pesce, *Il "Martirio di Isaia" non esiste: L'Ascensione di Isaia e le tradizioni giudaiche sull'uccisione del profeta* (Bologna: EDB, 1984); Norelli, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 59–67, 235–248; Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 31–33; Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 25–26; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 119, note 4; Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 363–390.

⁵⁸ Pierre Lacau, "Fragments de l'Ascension d'Isaïe en copte," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946): 453–467.

⁵⁹ Louis-Théophile Lefort, "Coptica Lovaniensia," *Le Muséon* 51 (1938): 24–32.

section 6:1–11:40: the Latin translation known from the edition made in Venice (1522) by Antonio de Fantis, referred to here as ‘L²’, and the Old-Slavonic translation, referred to here as ‘S’, transmitted from several manuscripts, of which seven were used for the edition quoted in this study. Two Greek menologies composed during the Byzantine age and based on two manuscripts preserve a theologically adapted summary of the Ascension of Isaiah. The text of the menologies was published (1878) in Greek by Oscar von Gebhardt and is referred to by him as a *Legend*, indicated here as ‘Leg’. Lastly, a papyrus from the fifth to sixth centuries, of unknown provenance, belonging to the Amherst collection, contains a Greek fragment of 2:4–4:4. This source is referred to here as ‘G’.

The authors of *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, the critical edition of the apocalypse that serves as the source for this study, propose the existence of an original Greek manuscript that influenced two distinct textual recensions of Ascls Part One. The material found in the ‘E’, ‘L¹’, ‘G’, and ‘C’ versions was reused in the late first century CE for another Greek composition, which originated the present apocalypse.

The view taken here is that all the available versions provide valuable content about religious experience. Therefore, because the Ethiopic text of the Ascension of Isaiah, referred to as ‘E’, provides the complete text and is regarded as closest to the Greek original, this study primarily focuses on this document. However, in the quest to establish the meaning of the passages analysed, quotations from ‘E’ are supplemented by specific contributions from Coptic documents (‘C^{sah}’ and ‘C^{akh}’), *Legenda Greca* (‘Leg’), the Old-Slavonic ‘S’ and Latin ‘L²’ versions, along with the Greek manuscript

Papyrus Amherst 1 ('G').⁶⁰ The synoptic arrangement of the quoted passages allows us to discern essential similarities and differences.

The following section of the Introductory aspects presents an overview of the major contours of previous treatments of the Ascension of Isaiah. This summary highlights the significant aspects of earlier analyses of this text, focusing on the interests and concerns raised in prior scholarship.

1.4 Previous Scholarship

The textual evidence for the Ascension of Isaiah is both abundant and diverse, as noted in ancient sources. Origen connects the belief in Isaiah's martyrdom to the existence of the apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah.⁶¹ While he refers to it as an *αποκρυφον*, he provides no details about its content beyond stating that Isaiah was sawn asunder. Montfaucon and Pitra register *Ἡσαίου ὁρασις*, known to the Archnotics and Hiericites, among Canonical and Apocryphal Books. Over time, these texts became less common in the West.

⁶⁰ Quotations of the 'E' version are taken from the critical edition by Lorenzo Perrone, "Ascensione di Isaia Profeta. Versione etiopica," in *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, ed. Bettolo et al., 1–129; quotations of the 'C' versions are from the edition by Paolo Bettolo, "Ascensione di Isaia. Versioni Copte," in *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, ed. Bettolo et al., 147–187; quotations of the 'S' version are from the edition by Alda Giambelluca Kossova, "Visio Isaiae. Versione Paleobulgara," in *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, ed. Bettolo et al., 235–319; quotations of the 'Leg' version are from the edition by Enrico Norelli, "Leggenda Greca di Isaia", in *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, Bettolo et al., 321–351; quotations of the 'L¹' and 'L²' versions are from the edition by Claudio Leonardi, "La tradizione Latina dell'Ascensione d'Isaia," in *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, Bettolo et al., 188–233. Quotations of the 'G' version are taken from the edition by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Amherst Papyri, Being an Account of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of the Right Hon. Lord Amherst of Hackney, F.S.A. at Didlington Hall, Norfolk. Part I: The Ascension of Isaiah, and Other Theological Fragments, with Nine Plates* (London: Oxford University, 1900), 1–22. My translation of the passages from the aforementioned works into English, along with my transliteration.

⁶¹ Origen, *Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew (Book X), Commentary on Mt 13:57*; Epiphanius, *Against Hieracites* (3,4).

In the nineteenth century, with increasing evidence of manuscripts containing Ge'ez and Latin translations of the work, the Ascension of Isaiah was initially published by Richard Laurence,⁶² followed by August Dillmann.⁶³ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Robert H. Charles released his version of the book based on Dillmann's edition, incorporating valuable material from the Slavonic translation of Ascls 6–11 and two Greek witnesses of the original text: Greek Legend and a papyrus fragment containing Ascls 2:4–4:4.⁶⁴ In 1909, Eugène Tisserant launched *Ascension d'Isaïe* based on the main versions of Greek, Latin, and Slavonic translations.⁶⁵ Charles's study shaped scholarly research on the Ascension of Isaiah for nearly a century. The scholar theorised that the current text of the apocalypse results from the combination of three distinct documents: the Martyrdom of Isaiah, the Testament of Hezekiah, and the Vision of Isaiah.

The literary studies on the Ascension of Isaiah entered a new era at the end of the twentieth century, thanks to the work of an Italian research team. Several significant articles authored by members of this group served as a prelude to their work. Pesce introduced a volume containing ten papers from the conference in Rome that examined various literary and historical aspects of the work.⁶⁶ Charles' theory

⁶² Richard Laurence, *Ascensio Isaiae vatis, opusculum pseudepigraphum, multis abhinc seculis, ut videtur, perditum, nunc autem apud Aethiopas compertum, et cum versione Latina anglicaque publici iuris factum* (London: J. Parker, Oxoniae, 1819).

⁶³ August Dillmann, *Ascensio Isaiae Aethiopice et Latine, cum prolegomenis, adnotationibus criticis et exegeticis, additis versionum latinarum reliquiis* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1877).

⁶⁴ Robert H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah Translated From the Ethiopic Version, Which Together with the New Greek Fragment, the Latin Versions and the Latin Translation of the Slavonic Is Here Published in Full* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1900).

⁶⁵ Eugène Tisserant, *Ascension d'Isaïe* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1909).

⁶⁶ Mauro Pesce (ed.), *Isaia, il Diletto e la chiesa: Visione ed esegesi profetica cristiano-primitiva nell'Ascensione di Isaia. Atti del convegno di Roma, 9-10 aprile 1981*, TRSR 20 (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1983). The contributors are A. Acerbi, U. Bianchi, P. C. Bori, I. P. Cuianu, G. Gnoli, E. Norelli, L. Perrone, M. Pesce, M. Simonetti.

regarding the origin of the current version of the Ascension of Isaiah faced criticism during the conference, with Pesce noting that the authors of the apocalypse drew upon oral traditions rooted in Jewish traditions. Acerbi, associated with the group, mapped out the transmission history of the Ascension of Isaiah from the second to the sixteenth century, analysing its content and composition.

The principal work of Italian researchers is the new edition of all the texts and versions of the work or parts of it, along with a synopsis in Latin, published as volume 7 of the *Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum* in 1995.⁶⁷ In this edition, the scholars consider the various textual forms resulting from a series of modifications or conscious innovations made within the traditions of each cultural and religious circle responsible for the changes introduced. Given that the available forms of the Ascension of Isaiah are non-original, the primary version of the text remains on the horizon for researchers. Consequently, various versions of a particular fragment are examined to identify and understand innovations aiming to reconstruct the singular form of the text that emerged from its original author. By highlighting these innovations, the literary study of the writing investigates the relationships among the variants. Scholars regard a version's autonomy as evidence of the text's function in diverse cultural and historical contexts. Intentions and historical arrangements are considered by emphasising the innovations that reflect a judgement on the possible original text.⁶⁸ Volume 8 of the *Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum* is a 600-page introduction and commentary by Norelli,⁶⁹ and a substantial volume of essays

⁶⁷ Paolo Bettiolo, Alda Giambelluca Kossova, Claudio Leonardi, Enrico Norelli, Lorenzo Perrone, *Ascensio Isaiae. Textus*. Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

⁶⁸ Bettiolo, *Ascensio Isaiae (Textus)*, x–xiv.

⁶⁹ Enrico Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae. Commentarius*. Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

continues to supplement this thorough work.⁷⁰ Norelli draws on earlier research and develops a two-stage theory of the Ascension of Isaiah's literary composition, which now serves as the consensus view for scholarship. According to this theory, Ascls 6–11 was written first, probably in Syria in the late first century CE, and Ascls 1–5 was added in the early second century, as discussed above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.2.1). Norelli undertook the decisive literary-critical study, which is considered definitive in many respects.

The present generation of scholarship on the Ascension of Isaiah is also characterised by the significant contributions of three English-speaking scholars. Richard Bauckham, for instance, argues that the primary objective of the Ascension of Isaiah, composed as a complete work amidst the circle of early Christian prophets at the end of the first century CE, was to establish a cosmological reading of the story of Jesus. This cosmological interpretation of the Gospel narrative was both popular and relevant to the Christian movement of the second and third centuries.⁷¹ Hall examines social-historical aspects of the Ascension of Isaiah, discusses its authorship, and highlights the revelatory words embedded in the work, which were employed in ancient Jewish meditative practices.⁷² Jonathan M. Knight analyses the apocalypse and its authorship within the context of the declining role of Christian prophecy by the second century.⁷³

⁷⁰ Enrico Norelli, *L'Ascensione di Isaia: Studi su un apocrifo al crocevia dei cristianesimi* (Origini NS 1; Bologna: Centro editoriale dehoniano, 1994); Enrico Norelli, *Ascension du prophète Isaïe* (Collection de Poche de l'AELAC; Turnhout: Brepols, 1993).

⁷¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 371–374; 381–390; Richard Bauckham, “How the Author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* Created its Cosmological Version of the Story of Jesus”, 24.

⁷² Robert G. Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah”, 289–306; Robert Hall, “Subtleties of Translation and Ancient Interpretation: Cues for Understanding the Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 145–174.

⁷³ Jonathan Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah. Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Jonathan Knight, “The Political Issue of the Ascension of Isaiah”, 355–

While the most reliable version of the text of the Ascension of Isaiah is established and the critical theory regarding its two-stage literary composition of the apocalypse is accepted, scholars continue to explore the work's contributions to the development of early Christian traditions. Darrell D. Hannah dismisses attempts to interpret the portrayal of the heavenly Christ as rooted in docetic grounds.⁷⁴ Knight evaluates angelomorphic Christology, eschatology, and the political significance of the apocalypse, considering it as ideological resistance by the inspired authority against the institutional church.⁷⁵ Drawing on Norelli's perspective on present and future eschatologies in the two halves of the apocalypse, Halls perceives heavenly and earthly timelines as disjointed. He argues that readers are summoned to experience heavenly glory while avoiding Beliar's earthly allure. Bauckham argues that the Ascension of Isaiah's soteriology and Christology aims to promote a cosmological reading of the story of Jesus. He outlines the resources and methods the author employed to construct this cosmological reading of the Gospel narrative.⁷⁶ Loren T. Stuckenbruck focuses on the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in the apocalypse, demonstrating that this writing constitutes the earliest evidence of worship being directed to this figure alongside Christ and God.⁷⁷ Meghan Henning and Tobias Nicklas analyse the authorship

379; Jonathan M. Knight, "The Ascension of Isaiah: A New(er) Interpretation," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan. N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann and Tobias Nicklas. SECA 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 45–74; Jonathan Knight, "Ascension of Isaiah," in *Encyclopaedia of Second Temple Judaism*, Vol. 1, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner, Loren T. Stuckenbruck (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 250–252.

⁷⁴ Darrell D. Hannah, "Isaiah's Vision in the Ascension of Isaiah and the Early Church", *JTS* 50 (1999): 80–101.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One: The Christology, Social Setting and Theological Context of the Ascension of Isaiah*. JSPS 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 89–91; Knight, "The Origin and Significance", 66–105.

⁷⁶ Richard Bauckham, "How the Author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* Created its Cosmological Version of the Story of Jesus", 23–43.

⁷⁷ Loren Stuckenbruck, "The Holy Spirit in the Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins. Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker and Stephen C. Barton, (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004), 308–320.

of the Ascension of Isaiah within the context of the debate about the “Parting of the Ways” between Jews and Christians. They advocate for a communitarian concept of the authorship of the apocalypse and hypothesise about their denominations, as observed above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.2.2).⁷⁸

The provenance of the apocalypse has been extensively discussed within academic circles, as noted above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.3). The concept of three distinct compositions, collected and edited by a Jewish redactor, as proposed by Charles at the beginning of the twentieth century, has been further reinforced by scholars’ attempts to place the document within Qumran mysticism and the context of Early Judaism. Thus, David Flusser and Marc Philonenko consider the work a typological representation of the story of Qumran’s Teacher of Righteousness. They claim that the apocalypse, based on a Jewish pseudepigraphic work, is a product of the Qumran community, which reveals the narrative of the persecution and death of the Teacher of Righteousness derived vis-à-vis Isaiah.⁷⁹ Although this hypothesis faced objections from André Caquot,⁸⁰ it was embraced by some scholars⁸¹ until the publication of the Italian scholars’ work in 1983, particularly Mauro Pesce, who convincingly argued against the existence of the so-called Martyrdom of Isaiah. This position undermined the idea that the Ascension of Isaiah is a Jewish apocalypse reworked by Christians.⁸² However, such a significant shift in scholarly views introduced by the Italian researchers did not

⁷⁸ Meghan Henning and Tobias Nicklas, “Questions of Self-Designation in the Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 175–198.

⁷⁹ Flusser, “The Apocryphal Book of *Ascensio Isaie*”, 34–47; Philonenko, “Martyre d’Ésaïe”, 1–10.

⁸⁰ André Caquot, “Bref Commentaire du ‘Martyre d’Isaïe’”, *Semitica* 23: 65–93.

⁸¹ See, particularly, George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Stories of Biblical and Early Post-Biblical Times,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo Josephus, CRINT* 2.2, ed. Michael E. Stone (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 33–87, here 55–56.

⁸² John J. Collins, “Introduction. Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Semeia* 14: *Apocalypse. Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins (Missoula, Scholars Press, 1979), 1–20,

produce an immediate change in perspective for many scholars. For decades, researchers perpetuated the views of those who worked at the beginning of the twentieth century and remained oblivious to the arguments of the Italian scholars.⁸³

Scholars investigate the structure of the cosmos and Isaiah's ascent in the apocalypse by examining clusters of parallels that indicate commonalities with Gnostic, Jewish, and Christian texts. Some interpret the cosmology as proof of developed Gnosticism or as merely Gnosticising,⁸⁴ while others emphasise the Gnostic undertones.⁸⁵ A group of researchers situates its cosmology within the context of early Jewish traditions and ascents. Noticing the seven-heavens cosmology within Ascls 6–11, Scholem posits its Jewish background, while Ithamar Gruenwald assumes a close connection with Hekhalot literature.⁸⁶ Gruenwald and Peter Schäfer observe a striking construction of Christian cosmology featuring the threefold order of angels, noting that this feature distinguishes Ascls 6–11 from contemporary Jewish accounts of mystical ascension.⁸⁷ Himmelfarb argues that the Ascension of Isaiah originates from the Jewish Isaianic tour, which includes hell, as discussed above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.2.2).⁸⁸ She also observes a close conceptual and historical relationship between early Jewish Merkavah mysticism and apocalypticism in the writing.⁸⁹ Bauckham identifies

⁸³ For studies that ignored the Italian group research, see Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 364, n. 7.

⁸⁴ Andrew K. Helmbold, "Gnostic Elements in the Ascension of Isaiah", *NTS* 18 (1972) 222–226; Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt in Urchristentum und Spätjudentum*. WUNT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1951), 216.

⁸⁵ Marta Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the Hekhalot Literature," *HUCA* 59 (1988) 73–100, here 83–84 with n. 45; Ioan P. Culianu, "La visione di Isaia e la tematica della Himmelsreise," in *Isaia, il Diletto e la chiesa*, 95–116, here 104; Ioan P. Culianu, *Psychanodia I. A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and its Relevance* (Leiden: Brill 1983), 8–9.

⁸⁶ Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 96–101.

⁸⁷ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 96–98; Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2011), 93–99.

⁸⁸ Marta Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 65.

⁸⁹ Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York, NY / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 55–58.

similarities to the book of Daniel in expanded biblical history, as seen in Ascls 1–5, and the tours of the heavens depicted in Ascls 6–11.⁹⁰ Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta notices a tripartite view of the cosmos in Ascls 6–11 (sublunary, celestial, and divine regions), which is present in the philosophical and cosmographical models in Aristotle and Plato. He suggests that the seven-heaven model might have been integrated into this scheme during the textual transmission.⁹¹

Scholars analyse collections of testimonies and traditions about Jesus found in the Ascension of Isaiah. Adriano Destro and Mauro Pesce identify affinities between the cosmological and Christological elements of the Ascension of Isaiah and the Johannine “constellation” of texts.⁹² Joseph Verheyden and Norelli debate whether the Ascension of Isaiah depends on the Gospel of Matthew or on Matthew’s source material in the Two-Source theory of Synoptic origins.⁹³ In addition to the testimonies concerning Jesus, scholars show interest in Isaianic traditions. Michael A. Knibb observes that Ascls 1–5 establishes references to the canonical book of Isaiah to claim that the revelation regarding the heavenly Christ was implicitly included in the canonical book.⁹⁴

Regarding the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the writing, interpreters connect the visionary behaviour described in Ascls 6 with currents of Jewish mysticism and generally agree

⁹⁰ Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 368–380; Bauckham, “How the Author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* Created its Cosmological Version of the Story of Jesus,” 28–29.

⁹¹ Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, “The Cosmology of the Ascension of Isaiah: Analysis and Re-Assessment of the Text’s Cosmological Framework,” in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 259–288.

⁹² Destro and Pesce, “The Ascension of Isaiah and the Johannist Constellation”, 199–234.

⁹³ Joseph Verheyden, “L’Ascension d’Isaïe et l’évangile de Matthieu: Examen de Al 3,13–18,” in *The New Testament in Early Christianity: La Réception Des écrits Néotestamentaires Dans Le Christianisme Primitif*, ed. Jean-Marie Sevrin, BETHL 86 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 247–274; Norelli, *L’Ascensione di Isaia*, 115–166 (“L’Al e il Vangelo di Matteo”); Warren C. Campbell, “The Residue of Matthean Polemics in the Ascension of Isaiah,” *NTS* 66, no. 3 (2020): 454–470.

⁹⁴ Michael A. Knibb, “Isaianic Traditions”, 636–650.

that the people surrounding Isaiah comprise a community of prophets who habitually communicate with angels and believe in heavenly journeys, as observed at the very beginning of this Chapter (cf. § 1.1).⁹⁵ Scholem considers this writing to be one of the oldest documents attesting to the belief that the soul ascends to seven heavens after death or in a state of ecstasy while the body remains alive.⁹⁶ While establishing the Greek synopsis of Ascls 6, Pier Cesare Bori notes the shared terminology used to depict Isaiah's ascent to heaven and Philo's account of the prophet's ecstatic performance.⁹⁷ Pierluigi Piovanelli demonstrates that the apocalypse is one of the earliest representatives of Merkavah and Hekhalot mysticism, and may even be considered the oldest Hekhalot text.⁹⁸ According to Hall and Norelli, the Ascension of Isaiah reflects the first-century prophetic guilds, particularly the scribal features of such schools, where the prophetic circle engages in its unique prophetic ministry.⁹⁹ However, Jan N. Bremmer contests Norelli and Hall's thesis. He argues that, due to the lack of historical evidence for a 'circle of prophets,' which he claims is a fictional construct, the Ascension of Isaiah represents the existence of a singular prophet and a group of individuals who pay attention to him.¹⁰⁰ Recently, Frankfurter has proposed situating the apocalypse within a shamanic milieu and prophetic religious culture. In his opinion, the subsequent disclosures of the prophetic séance performed in stages of a liturgical

⁹⁵ See above, note 1.

⁹⁶ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 54.

⁹⁷ Pier Cesare Bori, "L'estasi del profeta: 'Ascensio Isaiae' 6 e l'antico profetismo cristiano," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 1 (1980): 367–389.

⁹⁸ Pierluigi Piovanelli, "'A Door into an Alien World': Reading the *Ascension of Isaiah* as a Jewish Mystical Text," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*. SECA 11, ed. Jan. N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 119–144.

⁹⁹ Hall, "The Ascension of Isaiah: Community Situation, Date, and Place in Early Christianity," 289–306; Enrico Norelli, *Ascension du prophète*, 103–150; Legend, pp. 151–65).

¹⁰⁰ Jan N. Bremmer, "The Domestication of Early Christian Prophecy," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, edited by Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 18–20.

ritual, as observed in Ascls 6, may hold particular value for the beliefs and religious phenomena of the prophetic guilds.¹⁰¹

Some scholars address questions about the function of narratives in the entire composition. Acerbi proposes considering traces of liturgy, evident in Ascls 6, likely practised in the Antiochene Church by the prophets who also inspired scriptural exegetes.¹⁰² Hall notes that the writer of the Ascension of Isaiah, through the narratives, opens windows for readers and interpreters to grasp meanings that extend beyond the text. He argues that every act of reading was a performance during which interpreters mined oracles to perceive their significance through revelatory words. In this regard, revelatory words function as windows through which readers and listeners explore and uncover a wealth of meanings beyond the text by applying their mastery of scripture. This study applies Hall's idea in Chapter Five (cf. § 5.1.2).¹⁰³

Scholarly interest in interpreting the Ascension of Isaiah as a mystical text or as a document reflecting the authors' religious experience is particularly driven by the account of Isaiah's ascent, which is described with ecstatic elements. Many scholars consider this account as one of the finest descriptions of ecstasy from ancient times.¹⁰⁴ Rowland and Gruenwald observe that the Ascension of Isaiah depicts how the consciousness of the visionary, surrounded by his disciples, is influenced by his ascent

¹⁰¹ David Frankfurter, "The Ascension of Isaiah: Some Thoughts", in *Ancient Jew Review* (November 21, 2021), <https://www.ancientjewreview.com/read/2021/11/19/the-ascension-of-isaiah-some-thoughts>.

¹⁰² Acerbi, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 279–282.

¹⁰³ Robert Hall, "Subtleties of Translation and Ancient Interpretation: Cues for Understanding the Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 145–174.

¹⁰⁴ Johannes Lindblom, *Geschichte und Offenbarungen. Vorstellungen von göttlichen Weisungen und übernatürlichen Erscheinungen im ältesten Christentum* (Lund: Gleerup, 1968), 36; Robert Hall, *Revealed Histories: Techniques for Ancient Jewish and Christian Historiography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 144; Destro and Pesce, *From Jesus to his First Followers*, 344–346.

and vision, resulting in his falling into a trance.¹⁰⁵ Daniel Merkur points out that Isaiah, in Ascls 6, is immersed in an alternate state of consciousness while ascending to heaven. This description resembles the psychic state conditions depicted by Jewish apocalyptists.¹⁰⁶ In her recent essay on mysticism, April D. DeConick identifies communitarian worship in the Ascension of Isaiah as one of the most typical pathways developed by early Christians. DeConick notes that the communities of trained early Christian prophets, as described in the text, are connected with the experiences of ascent and heavenly worship.¹⁰⁷

Few scholars examine the question of religious experience in the apocalypse. A reading of Ascls 6 by Istvan Czachesz, viewed through the lens of cognitive sciences, deserves attention. Czachesz selects two neuroscientific models of religious experience that illuminate the structure of heavenly tours found in ancient Jewish and Christian sources. He applies these models in a concise analysis of selected verses from the Ascension of Isaiah, which appear to correspond to the phases of religious processes observed in the models of religious experience. Based on the connections he highlights, Czachesz concludes that the neurological findings outlined in the neuroscientific models of religious experience can elucidate various aspects of Isaiah's celestial journey. He contends it represents an 'awakening' experience, whether in a

¹⁰⁵ Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 229–231; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 97.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Merkur, "The Visionary Practices of Jewish Apocalypticists," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society 14: Essays in Honor of Paul Parin*, ed. L. B. Boyer and Simon A. Grolnick (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic, 1989), 124–125.

¹⁰⁷ April DeConick, "Traumatic Mysteries: Pathways of Mysticism among the Early Christians," in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 11–51, here 42–43.

traumatic or drug-induced state, which underlies Isaiah's vision in the Ascension of Isaiah.¹⁰⁸

In conclusion, scholars studying the Ascension of Isaiah pay considerable attention to its historical and literary aspects. Some scholars are interested in interpreting the apocalypse as a mystical text or analysing selected passages through the lens of neuroscientific models of religious experience. While studies on historical and literary subjects continue, no scholar has explored how early Christian communities comprehended and engaged with the two-stage composition while reading or listening to its visionary content, nor how it can be interpreted today through the lens of the phenomenological perspective on religious experience. Given these outlined academic interests and concerns, questions about the methodological approach to understanding the human experience of the divine in ancient literature intersect with the need to address the specific experiences of the authors, protagonists, and readers of the Ascension of Isaiah.

1.5 Addressing Religious Experience Phenomena

Scholarly discourse acknowledges the challenge of transitioning from identifying a religious phenomenon in ancient literature to establishing a methodologically controlled approach for isolating distinct aspects of human experiences of the divine in antiquity.¹⁰⁹ Methodological distinctions are essential for

¹⁰⁸ István Czachesz, "Religious Experience behind the Account of Isaiah's Ascent to Heaven: Insights from Cognitive Science," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, edited by Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 255–256; István Czachesz, *Cognitive Science and the New Testament. A New Approach to Early Christian Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 163–164.

¹⁰⁹ Stone, *Ancient Judaism*, 95–96, 103–104.

clarifying what can be explored as a religious experience and what can be examined about religious experience in the Ascension of Isaiah. In this section, I outline the methodological and theoretical foundation for isolating those aspects of human religious experience that are observable in the text, while the actual experience remains inaccessible.

While drawing out the methodology for this study, one must acknowledge the profound debt that contemporary scholars of early Jewish and Christian scholarship owe to the History of Religions School for its focus on ‘experience.’ Scholars of the Eranos circle, including Carl G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, Henry Corbin, Joachim Wach, Joseph Kitagawa and Scholem, proposed the idea that humans are *homo religiosus* and possess subjective experiences of the divine within sacred space and time.¹¹⁰ These experiences constitute the essence of religion as a phenomenon. They are rooted in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s well-known concept of religious experience, seen as a feeling,¹¹¹ and referred to by Rudolf Otto as the “*mysterium tremendum*.”¹¹² Thus, historians of religions identify the essence of religion in religious experience and perceive mystical activity as a fundamental mode of human interaction with the

¹¹⁰ For an approach to religious experience developed by historians of religions, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion. Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (New Jersey: Princetown University Presse, 1999), 191–193. For insights into how the phenomenology of religion was developed by the Eranos Circle in response to reductionism in the study of religion, see Thomas A. Idinopulos, Edward A. Yonan, *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

¹¹¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark: 1999); *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. R. Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹² Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J. W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). Also Jacqueline Mariña, “Schleiermacher and Otto,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 457–473.

divine.¹¹³ Scholem, in particular, opened the sources of mystical and messianic literature to academic inquiry and established an academic approach to this field.¹¹⁴ Consequently, the term “mystical experience,” when referenced in this study, refers to Scholem’s perspective on Jews’ otherworldly experiences of the divine realm, as highlighted in the Jewish visionary traditions explored in his works. This term is also applied to phenomena of conversion and even the apotheosis of a human being observed in some texts from the literature of the Qumran discoveries.

In addition to mystical activity, historians of religions highlight myth, symbol, and the imaginal as elements that constitute genuine contact with higher-order realities. By establishing mysticism and the aforementioned subjects as central points of their study, the scholars of the Eranos circle redirect their focus from reason. It is noteworthy, however, that while Eliade and Corbin criticise the historical profession and the social sciences, for what they claim is a “reduction” of religion, Scholem liberates the historian from positivistic historicism. He posits a “tie to the past” to comprehend the intent of articulating the paradoxes of religious experience presented in mysticism.¹¹⁵ He opened the sources of mysticisms¹¹⁶ and messianic literature to academic inquiry and dispelled the stigma and derision surrounding efforts to engage

¹¹³ For the significance of religious experience as considered by the representatives of the Eranos circle, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion. Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 191–193.

¹¹⁴ For a list of Scholem’s major works, see note 118. To comprehend Scholem’s authority on Jewish mysticism within the academic world, see Henry Patcher, “Masters of Cultural History. Gershom Scholem – The Myth of the Mythmaker,” *Salmagundi* 40, (1978): 9–39.

¹¹⁵ Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken, 1980), 166; David Biale, *Gershom Scholem – Master of the Kabbalah* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018). For criteria on historiography conducted by historians of religions, see Bryan Rennie, “Religion after Religion, History after History: Postmodern historiography and the study of religions,” *MTSR* 15, no. 1 (2003): 68–99.

¹¹⁶ For the significance of “mysticism” as the experience of the divine among early Christians and Jews, see April D. DeConick, “What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?” in *Paradise Now. Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April D. DeConick (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006), 1–26.

seriously with Kabbalistic sources and ideas. He considers mysticism and Kabbalism not as a bygone stage that Judaism shared with other religions such as Christianity, but rather as part of the innermost heritage of the Jewish nation that cannot be forgotten.¹¹⁷ Therefore, for over half a century, he explored ancient Jewish mystical traditions within their Jewish context and their relationship with Islam, so-called Gnosticism, and Christianity.¹¹⁸ As a result, the contemporary study of early Jewish and Christian literature is grounded on clear statements, which are briefly outlined below to properly situate the subject of this research, viz., the Ascension of Isaiah.

Early Jewish and Christian mystical tradition is present in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature,¹¹⁹ Qumran literature,¹²⁰ the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria,¹²¹ and probably in the teachings of the Palestinian Jewish school of Yohanan ben Zakkai.¹²² Subsequently, this tradition is assumed by the Pharisaic and

¹¹⁷ Gershom Scholem, "Kabbalah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, 16 vols, vol. 10 (Jerusalem / New York, NY: Keter Publishing House/Macmillan, 1972): 490–651.

¹¹⁸ Patcher, "Masters of Cultural History", 16.

¹¹⁹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 40–79; Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah, Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960); Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. R. Manheim (New York, NY: Schocken, 1965); Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 18–24; Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. J. Neugroschel, ed. J. Chapman (New York, NY: Schocken, 1991); Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 2nd ed. AGJU 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Christopher R. A. Morray Jones, "Merkabah Mysticism and Talmud Tradition," (Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University, 1988).

¹²⁰ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, vii; Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran: The 4Q Serekh Shirot 'Olat ha-Shabbat," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of A. Altmann*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), 15–47; Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, STDJ 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Rachel Ellior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, trans. D. Louvish (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004).

¹²¹ Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, By Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (Amsterdam: Philo, 1969); Henry Chadwick, "St. Paul and Philo of Alexandria," *BJRL* 48, no. 2 (1966): 286–307; Kaufmann Kohler, "Merkabah," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isidore Singer, Lewis N., Dembitz and J. Jacobs, Vol. 8, (New York/London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), 498–500.

¹²² Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 41; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Ha-Masorot 'al Torat ha-Sod bi-Tequmat ha-Tannaim," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion: Presented to G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. A. Altmann (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 1–28; John W. Bowker, "'Merkabah' Visions and the Visions of Paul," *JSS* 16, no. 2 (1971): 157–173; Jacob Neusner, *A Life of Yohanan ben Zakkai, ca. 1-80 C.E.* 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Arnold Goldberg, "Der Vortrag des Ma'asse Merkawa: Eine Vermutung zur frühen Merkavamystik," *Judaica* 29 (1973): 4–23, here 9–12; Christopher Charles Rowland, "The Influence

Tannaitic currents,¹²³ certain forms of Christianity,¹²⁴ “Gnostic” schools,¹²⁵ and later Kabbalistic materials.¹²⁶ The Ascension of Isaiah, according to contemporary research,¹²⁷ is a writing that its authors produced in close relation with Jewish circles interested in mysticism.

Consequently, this study examines the conceivable religious experiences depicted in the Ascension of Isaiah, observable through the signs throughout the text, as derived from the literature of the traditions summarised above or the religious experiences of those who produced this literature. According to earlier and

of the First Chapter of Ezequiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature,” (Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University, 1974); Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 282–283, 303–305; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, vii, 73–86; Jey J. Kanagaraj, “Mysticism” in *The Gospel of John: An Inquiry into Its Background*, JSNTSup 158 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 150–158.

¹²³ Schiffman, “Merkavah Speculation at Qumran”, 46; David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*. American Oriental Series, Vol. 62 (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1980); Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, “Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander’s Three Test Cases,” *JSJ* 22, no. 1 (1991): 1–39; David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision*, TSAJ 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988); Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic. Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

¹²⁴ For similarities between Paul and mystical Judaism, see Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 34–71; Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor. 12.1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources,” and “Part 2: Paul’s Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance,” *HTR* 86, no. 2 (1993): 177–217 and 265–292; John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). For traditions of Thomas, see April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, VCSup 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); April D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and Its Growth*, JSNTSup 286 (London: T&T Clark, 2005). About traditions of John, cf. April D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature*, JSNTSup 157 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Jey Kanagaraj, *Mysticism in the Gospel of John. An Inquiry into its Background* (London / New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1998).

¹²⁵ April D. DeConick, “Heavenly Temple Traditions and Valentinian Worship: A Case for First-Century Christology in the Second Century,” in *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila, and G. S. Lewis, JSJSup 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 308–341; April D. DeConick, “The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in the Gospel of Philip,” *VC* 55, no. 3 (2001): 225–261; Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry* (Leiden / Boston, MA / Köln: Brill, 2001).

¹²⁶ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹²⁷ Paolo Bettolo, Alda Giambelluca Kossova, Claudio Leonardi, Enrico Norelli, Lorenzo Perrone, *Ascensio Isaiae. Textus*. Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995); Enrico Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae. Commentarius*. Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995); Robert G. Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah: Community Situation, Date, and Place in Early Christianity,” *JBL* 109, no. 2 (1990): 289–306.

contemporary Jewish thought, the encounters with the divine experienced by early Jews and Christians are foundational for experiencing the divine realm and for worshipping Jesus Christ, who is revealed to the adherents within the apocalypse, namely its readers and listeners. Religious experience, rooted in the framework of a religious worldview in early Judaism, incorporates elements of visionary traditions, such as otherworldly journeys shaped by the apocalyptic imagination of Jewish circles. This experience originated from an interplay with the early ritual practices of Jesus' worship, as will be illustrated below in Chapter Two (cf. §§ 2.3–4). These rituals appear to be inspired by early Jewish mysticism, leading to experiences of ontic transformation, i.e., a self-perception of becoming angelic or even divine. The strands of praxes related to ontological conversion and apotheosis, which encouraged the idealisation of devotees during that period into divine or angelic beings within the celestial realm, compelled the early believers in the Beloved to experience an *unio mystica* with Jesus Christ, the preexisting divine being revealed to Isaiah. Although I do not intend to restrict the characteristics of this conceivable religious experience, my aim in discussing this topic in Chapter Two is to outline its contours as shaped by the religious traditions to which it owes its origin.

Historical criticism practised by interpreters of early Christian and Jewish literature has greatly contributed to the study of religion as a whole, providing valuable insights into the religious experiences of early Christians and Jews during the period of Second Temple Jewish religiosity. This study benefits from the historical approach of scholars whose investigations emphasise myth, symbol, the imaginal, and subjective experiences of the divine.

Alongside historical criticism and the historical-critical method traditionally employed in studies like this one (i.e., focused on the Ascension of Isaiah), an interdisciplinary approach is essential for exploring this literature. Why is this necessary? The criticism from constructivists regarding the unmediated character of religious experience has influenced scholarly approaches to human religious experience, particularly in studies examining literary representations of these experiences.¹²⁸ As a result, a scholarly perspective on the study of religious experience has emerged, suggesting that the contexts of writers can be articulated and that the texts they produce can be analysed. However, the transformative processes between the two remain impenetrable and, therefore, impossible to describe scientifically.¹²⁹ Recently, this scepticism has been alleviated, as the term “religious experience” appears to have been freed from its former subordination to cultural control and/or to linguistic determination, although the constructivist stance on the essential subjectivity of experience cannot be entirely resolved.¹³⁰ Despite this inherent challenge, the essential subjectivity of experience becomes more accessible when religious experience is examined through interdisciplinary methods and the lenses of the humanities.¹³¹ Consequently, contemporary biblical scholarship centred on

¹²⁸ For criticism of the theorists of constructive philosophy, see Steven Katz, “The ‘Conservative’ Character of Mystical Experience,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven Katz, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3–60; Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

¹²⁹ Robert H. Sharf, “The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion,” *JCS* 7, no. 11–12 (2000): 267–287;

¹³⁰ For arguments opposing Katz’s subordination of experience to cultural control, see Sallie King, “Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism,” *JAAR* 56, no. 2 (1988): 257–279, here 260. Torben Hammersholt, “Steven T. Katz’s Philosophy of Mysticism Revisited,” *JAAR* 81, no. 2 (2013): 467–490.

¹³¹ For discussions on applying interdisciplinary methods in studies of religious experience, see Jensine Andresen and Robert K. C. Foreman, “Methodological Pluralism in the Study of Religion,” in *Cognitive Models and Spiritual Maps: Interdisciplinary Explorations of Religious Experience* (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 2000).

embodiment in biblical prophetic literature has revisited experience and sharpened its focus on religious experience in antiquity.¹³² Scholars' approaches offer complex yet clear resources for interpreting experiences with the divine, and their studies are regarded more as contributions to explaining religious experience than as efforts to impose absolute limits on such experiences.¹³³

Considering the above, a compound of methodologies and theories outlined below, drawn from various academic disciplines, allows this study to investigate signs of religious experience in the Ascension of Isaiah. Building upon Rodney A. Werline's methodological distinctions, applied in his examination of prayer as a religious experience, I identify the signs of religious experience within the text of the Ascension of Isaiah as either external or internal factors influencing the visionary.¹³⁴ External factors are those that originate from or are situated *outside* the visionary, whereas internal factors emerge from or are situated *inside* the visionary. The aim of this study, particularly in Chapter Three, is to draw upon various elements of experience that are accessible from *outside* the visionary employing concepts developed in 1) linguistics, namely Jacques Derrida's theory of language; 2) sociology, particularly Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*; 3) anthropology, specifically, Roy A. Rappaport's

¹³² For contributions to the understanding of religious experience in Early Christian and Jewish Literature, wherein authors revise and reinvigorate this understanding by attempting to access subjective experience, see Francis Flannery, Colleen Shantz, Rodney Werline, *Experientia, Vol. 1. Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Colleen Shantz, Rodney Werline, *Experientia, Vol. 2, Linking Text and Experience* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012); Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *The Prophetic Body. Embodiment and Mediation in Biblical Prophetic Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024).

¹³³ For insights into how an individual's experience can be shaped by culture and also be innovative, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹³⁴ Rodney A. Werline, "The Experience of Prayer and Resistance to Demonic Powers in the Gospel of Mark", in *Experientia, Vol. 1. Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Francis Flannery, Colleen Shantz, Rodney Werline, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 61.

theories of ritual actions and the concept of *communitas*; and 4) in the context of ritual theories, the concept of embodied subjectivity, as articulated by Stanley J. Tambiah, Catherine Bell, and Gavin Brown, is applied. These ideas enhance our understanding of how and to what extent the subjective elements of the cultural environment influenced the visionary's personal encounter with the divine in relation to a circle of prophets in the Ascension of Isaiah. Details on how these theories illuminate signs of religious experience and relevant references are provided in the subsequent paragraphs below.

Subsequently, the internal aspects of the visionary's experience, which reside within or are located *inside* the visionary, are observed. The aim of this study, particularly in Chapters Four and Five, is to draw upon the internal factors of the religious experience that emerge from the visionary, utilising tools from 1) neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, the philosophy of mind, and embodied experience, specifically Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen's concepts regarding narrative theory and embodied cognition, along with Anežka Kuzmičová's notion of enactive reading; 2) neuropsychology, particularly Daniel Merkur's ideas elucidating the objective of ecstasy oriented dialogues between visionaries and angels found in Jewish apocalypses; and 3) cognitive linguistics, especially Luca Arcari's theory of re-actualising visionary accounts, based on relevance theory, alongside Angela K. Harkins' concept of immersive reading of visionary reports from ancient apocalypses. The application of these ideas intersects with the methodologies employed by Harkins to approach accounts of religious experiences in the Hodayot hymns and the narratives in the Shepherd of Hermas. This approach is also underpinned by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, which regards the human body as the foundation of knowledge. Details on how these theories and

methodologies illuminate signs of religious experience, along with relevant references, are provided in the paragraphs below.

Two conceptual blocks are considered to analyse signs of religious experience located outside the visionary. These blocks are employed to investigate the nature of the visionary account text, Ascls 6–11. First, a theoretical foundation for ritual actions that generate embodied subjectivity and the condition of the body in practitioners is established, which aids in elucidating their encounters with the divine. This block, as illustrated in the sections below, incorporates Rappaport's theories on ritual actions, along with Tambiah, Bell, and Brown's concept regarding the embodied subjectivity that emerges during ritual performances, as well as Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. Second, the communitarian aspect of the experience in rituals performed by practitioners who utilised a routine based on Jewish and Christian visionary patterns is established. This block, as demonstrated in the paragraphs below, encompasses Rappaport's anthropological concept of *communitas* and Derrida's iteration theory.

One of the traces indicating an encounter with the divine is the description of the meeting, which unfolds in stages during a liturgical ritual led by Isaiah, the visionary, alongside the accompanying prophets. A key concern is to determine how the religious practice depicted in the text guides participants in the cultic events to develop a conviction or, at the very least, an acceptance that the ritual experience constitutes a form of religious experience. Rappaport's theories of ritual actions, which relate to the mood and disposition of the group, shape the inquiry into how religious practice can be perceived as a religious experience by both individuals and the community. The frequent recitation of liturgical fragments during earthly cultic events suggests that they serve as a conduit for the experience of communion between the

members of the cult and the angels. According to Rappaport, in religious experience, two apparent oppositions – namely, the discursive (which relies on reason and rationality) and the non-discursive (grounded in emotions, intuitions, and bodily experiences) – are integrated. Individuals achieve the fusion point of these opposites through ritual performance, as ritual action “makes the reasons of the heart one with the reasons of reason.”¹³⁵

The idea that repetitive and performative religious practices engendered visionary experience in the ancient readers and listeners of the Ascension of Isaiah raises questions about how reiterative performative experiences can generate processes that lead to such subjective experiences. These questions necessitate the establishment of a theoretical foundation for ritual performance. The theoretical framework for performance theory, developed in ritual studies, is articulated by Tambiah, Bell, and Brown.¹³⁶ The generative power of subsequent ritual performances and the concept of embodied subjectivity are key aspects of ritual experience underscored by this theory. Ritualised actions performed within communities serve as meaning-making experiences, producing embodied subjectivity in the participants.¹³⁷ These points are crucial for understanding how the ancient readers and listeners of the Ascension of Isaiah could engender the subjective experience of the divine realm.

¹³⁵ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Cultural Anthropology 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 383; cf. 216–235 and 382–388.

¹³⁶ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, “A Performative Approach to Ritual,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113–169; Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 37–46; Henry Bial, *The Performance Studies Reader* (New York, NY / London: Routledge, 2007), 98–106; Gavin Brown, “Theorizing Ritual as Performance: Explorations of Ritual Indeterminacy,” *JRitSt* 17 (2003): 3–18.

¹³⁷ Catherine Bell, “Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy,” *HR* 27, no. 4 (1988): 366–392.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* reinforces the notion of embodied subjectivity. Bourdieu posits that cultures install beliefs in their societies through practices that engender in their members a "state of body" rather than simply a "state of mind." He argues that individuals engaged in religious practices do not just express ideas through their actions but genuinely believe in what they enact in their bodies. Consequently, the knowledge that participants acquire through their bodies is not merely retained; it becomes embodied and transforms into their identity.¹³⁸ By applying the notion of embodied subjectivity and the concept of *habitus* to the description in Ascls 6 of the staged performance of the ritual, one can discern that the author, readers, and listeners of the visionary account involved in the prophetic ritual were convinced they were encountering the divine.

Regarding the prophetic meeting, scholars generally agree that the individuals surrounding Isaiah constitute a community of prophets who routinely communicate with angels and believe in heavenly journeys, as noted above in this Chapter (cf. § 1.1). Once again, Rappaport's theories are crucial for examining the communitarian aspect of the experiences noted in the Ascension of Isaiah. The anthropologist, drawing on Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*,¹³⁹ notes that the participation of individuals in the harmonious practice of congregational rituals integrates members and reveals the divine. Those who experience intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging in *communitas* during liturgical rituals of cultic events do so partly because of the group influence congregated in a concomitant practice. According to Rappaport,

¹³⁸ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 73.

¹³⁹ For rituals that compel practitioners to experience the divine, when performed in *communitas*, see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 128. For modalities and processes in *communitas*, see esp. 131–165.

concomitancy not only fosters comprehensive self-unification of participation in ritual but also “may bring the acts and sensations of the body into the mind’s computations” because it integrates somatic and mental processes. Consequently, the practitioners may even feel a sense of “oneness” with the cosmos.¹⁴⁰ Concomitancy in liturgical rituals and somatic-mental processes, which lead practitioners to a sense of “oneness” with the cosmos, are significant for considering how the religious experience was engendered through the prophetic liturgy in the Ascension of Isaiah.

Scholars regard the text of the visionary account, Ascls 6–11, as a product of prophetic groups referencing their own performances.¹⁴¹ This assertion raises questions about the originality of the visionary accounts generated by prophetic groups engaging in rituals. To explore this inquiry, this study considers the iteration theory articulated by Derrida in “Signature Event Context.”¹⁴² Derrida’s theory of language has influenced modern performance theory¹⁴³ and ritual studies.¹⁴⁴ He acknowledges that signatures can function effectively, but their efficacy relies on the recognisable nature of successive iterations and imitations of the so-called ‘original’ form. According to him, “every repetition is an alteration (iteration)” that imperfectly replicates the initial event while remaining identifiable as an imitation. The crux of iteration theory is that the original event is a delayed consequence stimulated by the

¹⁴⁰ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 380–388. For a typology of religious rituals and an approach to their different phases through the lenses of psychology, see Robert N. McCauley, E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind. Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴¹ Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, *From Jesus to his First Followers: Continuity and Discontinuity. Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 100–101.

¹⁴² Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1988), 1–23.

¹⁴³ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*, 2nd ed. (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁴⁴ Rosalind C. Morris, “Legacies of Derrida: Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36 (2007): 355–389.

typology derived from numerous reproductions. Each iteration can be detached from its original context and stands as an autonomous citation.¹⁴⁵ The iteration theory is essential for this study in considering the celestial visions in the Ascension of Isaiah as a result of rites performed in *communitas*.

After examining the signs of religious experience originating from or situated outside the visionary, this study shifts its focus to analysing those signs of religious experience that emerge from or reside *inside* the visionary. By insights into observable signs from within an individual, I refer to the aspects of experience explored through attention to the human body. This study's interest in the corporeality and perception of transcending phenomena through the human body is prompted by the nature of the religious event described in the Ascension of Isaiah, characterised as a heavenly journey and prophetic ecstasy. The emphasis on cognitive processes also draws upon Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, which advocates rediscovering the human body as the foundation of knowing,¹⁴⁶ as well as on studies in human cognition that indicate reciprocal connections between body and mind in cognitive processes.¹⁴⁷

As demonstrated and referenced in the paragraphs below, the traces of the visionary's ecstatic experience are examined through a combination of ideas from the

¹⁴⁵ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 20.

¹⁴⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, 2nd ed. (London/New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁴⁷ For studies emphasizing the reciprocal connections between the body and mind in cognitive processes, see Piotr Winkielmann, Paula M. Niedenthal, Joseph Wielgosz, Jiska Eelen, Liam C. Kavanagh, "Embodiment of Cognition and Emotion," in *APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 1, Attitudes and Social Cognition*, ed. Mario Mikulincer, Philip R. Shaver, Eugene Borgida, John A. Bargh (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 151–175. For an introduction to the science of "Embodied Cognition", see Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016); Lawrence A. Shapiro, *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). For an "Embodied Cognition" list of claims related to the nature of human religiousness, see Warren Brown, "Embodied Cognition and the Neurology of Religion," in *Neurology and Religion*, ed. Alasdair Coles and Joanna Collicutt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 25–34.

humanities, specifically neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, and the philosophy of mind, studies in cognitive processes and embodied experience, as well as methods employed by scholars of early Jewish and Christian literature. Consequently, concepts from Caracciolo and Kukkonen regarding narrative theory and embodied cognition, along with Kuzmičová's notion of enactive reading, intersect with Harkins and Arcari's ideas and postulates concerning visionary accounts in apocalyptic writings in general and, in particular, with the methodologies they employ when reading narratives of the Shepherd of Hermas.

The emotional language attributed to the visionary through first-person speech and the considerable footprint of emotions in the visionary account (7:2–11:35) raise questions about the elements of the human body involved in otherworldly journeys. Harkins interprets a similarly remarkable emotional language and bodily experience within the Hodayot collection in relation to the religious experience. The physical and psychological tragedies described, along with the specific emotion of fear, were re-enacted and re-experienced by an ancient reader who, through performative reading, actualised the first-person speech of the text and thus participated in the depicted conversions.¹⁴⁸ Harkins also refers to accounts of religious experiences that feature dramatic references to the speaker's body transformation in the Hodayot. The ritual role of emotions, conceptualised under the term "affective script," and immersive reading, are principles Harkins employs in her examination of the visions in the Shepherd of Hermas, supporting the thesis that readers and listeners enact experiences and participate in the narrative logic of ancient visions. In line with

¹⁴⁸ Harkins, *Reading with an "I"*, 72; Angela Kim Harkins, "The Performative Reading of the Hodayot: The Arousal of Emotions and the Exegetical Generation of Texts," *JSP* 21, no. 1 (2011): 55–71.

cognitive science, Harkins observes that as readers and listeners immerse themselves in narratives—while reading, listening, and engaging with the figures involved kinaesthetically— their minds can re-enact the speaker’s movements and revive memories of similar emotional experiences.¹⁴⁹ The methodological approaches employed by Harkins are crucial for examining the function of emotions and the elements of the human body as presented in Ascls Part One.

The vividness of the visionary narrative in Ascls 7–9, with its accurate and impassioned depiction of the heavenly journey, alongside the dialogue between the visionary and the angel, which consists of twelve questions and answers, fosters interest in understanding the authors’ purpose for employing such rhetorical resources. Caracciolo and Kukkonen’s narrative theory of embodied cognition,¹⁵⁰ along with Kuzmičová’s enactive reading concept,¹⁵¹ elucidate the cognitive processes that reveal how readers and listeners can physically experience narratives through their perception of sensorimotor movement. Merkur’s work is pivotal in comprehending Isaiah’s ascent (Ascls 6:10–12), described in ecstatic terms, alongside the narratives of the dialogue between the visionary and the angel (Ascls 7–9). He notes that the visionary accounts of apocalypses featuring otherworldly journeys are viewed as message dreams interpreted by seers and explained by angels. The function of such dialogues is both

¹⁴⁹ Angela Kim Harkins, “Entering the Narrative World of Hermas’s Visions,” in *Experiencing the Shepherd of Hermas*, ed. Angela Kim Harkins and Harry O. Maier. Exstasis 10 (Berlin / Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2022), 117–136; Harkins, “Looking at the *Shepherd of Hermas* through the Experience of lived religion,” in *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Valentino Gasparini, Maik Patzelt, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke, Emiliano Urcioli (Berlin / Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2020), 49–70, here 54. Following cognitive science, Harkins observes that while reading and listening to narratives about figures engaged in kinaesthetic activities, the minds of readers and listeners can re-enact the movements of the speaker and revive memories of similar emotional experiences.

¹⁵⁰ Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen, *With Bodies: Narrative Theory and Embodied Cognition* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press; 2021).

¹⁵¹ Anežka Kuzmičová, “Presence in the reading of literary narrative: A case of motor enactment,” *Semiotica* 189 (2012): 23–48.

inspirational and compelling, leading to an alternate state of consciousness, which is also perceptible through the seer's emotional state oscillating between depression and elation.¹⁵² The reality of cognitive processes in apocalyptic visionary experiences, as recognised by scholarship,¹⁵³ alongside the objective of these processes to induce ecstatic states is supported by April DeConnick. She refers to cognitive science and neuropsychology to illustrate how trauma can lead to altered states of consciousness and alternative psychic states typically expressed in early Christian texts.¹⁵⁴ Caracciolo and Kukkonen's narrative theory of embodied cognition, along with Kuzmičová's enactive reading concept and Merkur's methodological approach elucidating the objective of dialogues between visionaries and angels found in Jewish apocalypses, is essential for exploring the function of the vivid language and the dialogue between the visionary and the angel in Ascls Part One.

The similar signs of religious experiences observed in Ascls Part One and Ascls Part Two raise questions about how to approach the religious experiences continuing in Ascls Part Two, as well as inquiries concerning the origins of the narratives. Here, two theories developed by scholars of early Jewish and Christian literature are considered. The first is Arcari's theory of the re-actualisation of visionary accounts.¹⁵⁵ The second is

¹⁵² Daniel Merkur, "The Visionary Practices of Jewish Apocalypticists," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society 14: Essays in Honor of Paul Parin*, ed. L. B. Boyer and Simon A. Grolnick (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic, 1989), 119–148.

¹⁵³ Robert H. Charles, *Eschatology: A Critical History of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1999), 174; Stone, *Ancient Judaism*, 90–121; Harkins, *Reading with an 'I'*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ April DeConnick, "Traumatic Mysteries: Pathways of Mysticism among the Early Christians," in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 11–51.

¹⁵⁵ Luca Arcari, "P. Oxy. 1.5 and the *Codex Sangermanensis* as 'visionary living texts': visionary habitus and processes of 'textualization' and/or 'scripturalization' in *Late Antiquity, in Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics*, ed. Valentino Gasparini, Maik Patzelt, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke and Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli in cooperation with Elisabeth Begemann (Berlin / Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2020), 469–492, here 471–73. For the theory of living text, see David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Hugh A. G. Houghton, *Liturgy and the Living Text of the New*

Harkins' idea that the immersive reading of visionary reports from ancient apocalypses led to further writings. She applied this concept to the analysis of narratives in the Shepherd of Hermas.¹⁵⁶ Arcari postulates a correlation and interaction between visionary experience, textualisation, and the production of apocalyptic writings as living visionary texts. According to this idea, in the earliest stages of early Jewish and Christian texts, there existed proto-texts of visionary accounts referred to as "living texts," capable of activating experiences of contact with the divine realm. The textualisation of visionary accounts is a process during which the visionary patterns and experiences are re-adapted in documents that generate authority. Arcari's theory employs the concept of living text alongside Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's relevance theory from cognitive linguistics, the specifics of which will be presented below in Chapter Five (cf. § 5.1.2). In light of this theory, while interpreting a text, listeners and readers engage in processes of constantly creating meaning, down to the very words themselves, rather than merely duplicating thoughts.¹⁵⁷ Arcari's theory of re-actualising visionary accounts and Harkins' concept of immersive reading of visionary reports from ancient apocalypses, which gave rise to further writings, are essential for observing signs of religious experiences in Ascls Part Two and for bringing us closer to the origins of the narratives.

Testament. Papers from the Tenth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018).

¹⁵⁶ Harkins, "Entering the Narrative World of Hermas's Visions", 130–131. For a similar idea applied (1) to the studies of Shepherd of Hermas, see Luca Arcari, "P. Oxy. 1.5 and the *Codex Sangermanensis* as "visionary living texts", 487–488; and (2) to the studies on early Jewish and Christian apocalypses, see Luca Arcari, *Vedere Dio. Le apocalissi giudaiche e protocristiane (IV secolo a.C. – II secolo d.C.)* (Rome: Carocci editore, 2020), 149–158.

¹⁵⁷ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995); Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, *Meaning and Relevance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2012).

The introductory issues emphasise the text of the Ascension of Isaiah, its authors, provenance, and socio-historical context, alongside a combination of methods and concepts selected to help us come closer to the religious experience that produced, underlies and results from the text. These elements raise questions about the traditions embedded within a framework of literary components rooted in the patterns of early Jewish visionary experiences, which underpin the conceivable religious experiences reflected in the imprinted signs of religious phenomena in the text. The following Chapter unveils how external forces, namely Jewish and non-Jewish practices of ascent to the heavens, shaped the religious experiences marked in the two-staged apocalypse.

Chapter Two: Ancient Near Eastern Practices of Heavenly Ascents and Cult

Introduction

The intricate account in Ascls Part One, which details how the visionary ascended to the heavenly realm and encountered divine beings, is pertinent to what can be examined and understood about the religious experience portrayed in the Ascension of Isaiah, as derived from the religious tradition of the period. The prophet Isaiah's vision (7:2–11:35) is intricately woven into a prophetic liturgy on earth (6:1–7:1; 11:36–39), in the heavens, and particularly in the seventh heaven, where the celestial beings worship Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God (9:28-10:6). Amidst this earthly-heavenly worship, Isaiah's mind is transported to the heavens, embarking on a journey through the seven heavens, where he worships the divine beings alongside angels and the Righteous. Scholars acknowledge the ecstatic character of the description of the phenomenon, highlighting that the heavenly journey and prophetic ecstasy indicate how widely accepted this practice and cultural pattern were among

Jesus's followers, in Jewish groups, in Hellenistic circles, and in Syria around the end of the first century, as observed above in Chapter One (cf. § 1.4).¹⁵⁸

The idea of encountering the divine, which permeates the stages of apocalyptic eschatology in the Ascension of Isaiah, is shaped by external forces. Heavenly ascents, journey reports, and visionary experiences feature prominently in the diverse traditions found in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings, as well as Hekhalot literature and texts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Hellenistic traditions. Vivid depictions of celestial realms and their inhabitants, angelic liturgy, and the status of the Righteous in the heavenly realm are prevalent in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Consequently, the transformation of the body, along with physical and behavioural changes, and the heavenly journey undertaken by Isaiah within a liturgical context infused with elements of ecstasy may owe much to both Jewish and non-Jewish practices of ascent to the heavens. The themes and Merkavah motifs appearing in several Jewish and Christian apocalypses, including the Ascension of Isaiah, indicate that the account of the revelation to Isaiah (Ascls 7–11) is part of a development trajectory stemming from pre-rabbinic visionary literature, including some texts from the Qumran discoveries.¹⁵⁹

The environment of the larger Jewish society during the Second Temple period provides cultural elements, patterns, and literary forms that determine how the prophets and interpreters of the apocalypse may have experienced the divine realm.

¹⁵⁸ John J. Collins and M. Fishbane (ed.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany, (NY): State University Press, 1993); Moshe Idel, "On the Language of Ecstatic Experience in Jewish Mysticism," in *Religionen—Religiöse Erfahrung; Religions—The Religious Experience*, ed. Tilo Schabert and Matthias Riedl (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008); Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Diana Stein, Sarah Kielt Costello and Karen Polinger Foster (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Ecstatic Experience in the Ancient World* (London / New York (NY): Routledge, 2022).

¹⁵⁹ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 40–44; Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 136–137, 156–158; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 58.

Reports of experiences of heavenly journeys that span extensive cultural areas and long periods suggest that such journeys were not only considered possible and described in literary works but were also actively practised.¹⁶⁰ Shared vocabulary and similar concepts used to describe visionary experiences are viewed, on the one hand, as trajectories of early Jewish and Christian thought,¹⁶¹ and on the other hand, as remnants of religious experiences reconstructed by scholars.¹⁶² The commonalities among the accounts of the otherworld noted in visionary traditions allow scholars to formulate theories about religious experiences understood as repetitive practices achieved through meditation and enactive reading.¹⁶³ Some academics suggest examining early Judaism and Christianity from the perspective of the apocalyptic genre because this visionary tradition is perceived as a generative literary form that

¹⁶⁰ Adriana Destro and Mario Pesce, “Le voyage céleste. Tradition d’un genre ou schéma culturel en contexte?” in *L’Oiseau et le poisson. Cohabitations religieuses dans les mondes grec et romain*. Religions dans l’histoire, ed. Nicole Belayche and Jean-Daniel Dubois (Paris: PUPS, 2011), 361–386; Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, “The Heavenly Journey in Paul. Tradition of a Jewish Apocalyptic Literary Genre or Cultural Practice in A Hellenistic-Roman Context?” in *Paul’s Jewish Matrix*, ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor (Rome / Mahwah, NJ: Gregorian and Biblical Press – Stimulus Books, 2011), 167–200; Destro and Pesce, *From Jesus to his First Followers*, 87–105.

¹⁶¹ Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2011); Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York, NY / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Annette Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁶² Philip Alexander, *The Mystical Texts, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts*. Library of Second Temple 61 (London/New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2006); Andrei Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, TSAJ 107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature*, SJSJ 70 (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982); April DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now. Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2006); Francis Flannery, Colleen Shantz, Rodney Werline (ed.), *Experientia, Vol. 1. Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Colleen Shantz, Rodney Werline (ed.), *Experientia, Vol. 2, Linking Text and Experience* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

¹⁶³ Angela Kim Harkins, *Experiencing Presence in the Second Temple Period: Revised and Updated Essays*. Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 111 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022); Angela Kim Harkins, *An Embodied Reading of the Shepherd of Hermas: The Book of Visions and its Role in Moral Formation*. Studies in Ancient Religion and Culture Series (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2023).

compelled readers and listeners of the period, and the subsequent generations, to engage with and re-actualise the texts, which often sourced further writings.¹⁶⁴

The recognition of how the visionary experiences practiced by individuals and communities in the past engendered further experiences leads this study to trace the pathway of how the conceivable visionary experience described in the Ascension of Isaiah was shaped. Our interest is attracted by passages in Ascls Part One that share similarities with early Jewish and Christian visionary traditions. The aim is to identify these shared elements that may have compelled prophets and interpreters, the actual readers and listeners of the apocalypse, to experience the divine realm. Because the visionary phenomenon unfolds during a collective prophetic liturgy, particular emphasis is placed on assessing the potential influence of the communitarian liturgy on the religious experience underlying the visionary account of the apocalypse.

Ascent to the divine realm and heavenly journeys are common motifs in the early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions, as well as in Jewish mysticism. The seer's encounter with the divine reflects, either directly or indirectly, the authors' own experiences or those known to them, even if relatively distant. This Chapter delves into the Enochic experiences of transformation from human to divine being and explores the *havurah* account from the Hekhalot literature. The interconnectedness of the relationships between the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, the Hodayot, the Self-Glorification Hymn, 4QSongs of Sage, 4QInstruction, and the Ascension of Isaiah comes into view, allowing a better understanding of how the broader religious trajectories of experiencing the divine permeate the larger early Jewish and Christian society.

¹⁶⁴ Harkins, "Entering the Narrative World of Hermas's Visions", 117.

Liturgical passages found in the Shepherd of Hermas, Odes of Solomon, Revelation of John, and the First Letter of Clement enhance our understanding of how the early Christian liturgic traditions of worshipping Jesus were applied in the apocalypse. Finally, instances of the ecstatic phenomenon in the religious practices of prophetic currents in the ancient Near East are examined to identify components that may suggest the genuineness of the ecstatic experience described in the Ascension of Isaiah.

2.1 Ascent and Heavenly Journey

The visionary account of Isaiah is tied to the literary traditions of Merkavah mysticism. The scholarly discourse on the origin, purpose, and content of early Jewish mysticism greatly owes to the pioneering work of Gershom Scholem. His research identifies three stages of Jewish mysticism, collectively referred to as Merkavah mysticism, as discussed above in Chapter One (cf. § 1.5). The roots of Merkavah mysticism lie in the biblical and pseudepigraphic traditions of pre-rabbinic apocalyptic circles, which produced 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and 4 Ezra, eventually evolving into its rabbinic and Hekhalot phases. Thus, Merkavah mysticism received by the Tannaim served as a conduit from the apocalypses of the Second Temple period to the Hekhalot literature.

Hekhalot literature may have originated in Palestinian circles during the Talmudic or even Tannaitic period, preserving works considered to be the climax of Merkavah mysticism.¹⁶⁵ Since Scholem's groundbreaking research, it has been

¹⁶⁵ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 41–52; Elijah, *The Three Temples*, 29–34; Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 245. The origin of Hekhalot material, which emerged to compensate for the loss of the sacrificial cult after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, is dated by Elijah back to

recognised that one of the key features of early Jewish mysticism is the ascent to the heavens.¹⁶⁶ According to Scholem, Hekhalot texts and the early apocalypses are closely related through their characteristic symbolism, particularly the throne imagery, which is one of the central themes of the Merkavah tradition. Scholem also notes that both the early apocalyptic traditions and the Hekhalot writings provide reports of actual ecstatic experiences. He argues that the Jewish pseudepigrapha were the essential sources for the development of Merkavah and Hekhalot mysticism. This is the topic that will be explored next.

2.1.1 Enochic Traditions

According to Scholem, the Fourth Book of Ezra and the Apocalypse of Abraham, with their essential imagery and concepts, are crucial for later Jewish mystical developments.¹⁶⁷ However, it is the Enochic traditions, particularly compositions such as 1 Enoch (Ethiopic) and 2 Enoch (Slavonic), that truly embody the earliest formulations of Jewish mystical developments.¹⁶⁸

The Book of Watchers presents a unique paradigm for the origin of evil, distinct from the account of Adam and Eve. In this narrative, sin is introduced into the world by supernatural beings, the fallen angels known as Watchers, who are guilty of sexual immorality, inappropriate revelation, and inciting violence on earth. Enoch, a righteous scribe, is brought into this story to intercede for the Watchers. Although the

the second century, and composed in the first century CE. Peter Schäfer suggests that much of Hekhalot literature, including Hekhalot Rabbati, represents a late rabbinic or even post-rabbinic phenomenon from the sixth century or later. However, he also acknowledges that some of this material may be earlier.

¹⁶⁶ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 43–50, 72; Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 14–21.

¹⁶⁷ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 40.

¹⁶⁸ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 43.

intercession is unsuccessful, it affords Enoch the chance to explore the chambers of the heavenly temple. Enoch is then taken to heaven and brought into the presence of God, where he stands like a heavenly priest, despite not undergoing transformation upon ascending to the heavenly temple.

The motif of Enoch's ascent to heaven, along with his bodily descriptions and expressions of the emotional upheaval caused by both the ascent and the vision, is particularly intriguing. The emotions and body language depicted seem to be characteristic of an authentic visionary experience.¹⁶⁹ Enoch's feelings echo Isaiah's profound confession: "I was afraid, and I began trembling" (9:1). While Enoch is in heaven, he struggles to accurately discern sensations of heat and cold: "And I went into that house – hot as fire and cold as snow, and no delight of life was in it. Fear enveloped me, and trembling seized me, and I was quaking and trembling" (1 En 14,13–14).¹⁷⁰

A similar description of the seer's feelings can be found in the Book of Similitudes, also known as the Parables of Enoch (1 En 37–71). This composition addresses the fate of the righteous after death and develops a vision featuring the "Son of Man" figure, who will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous. Enoch is taken up to heaven and witnesses this vision there, although he is not granted a tour, and there is no description of the journey. When Enoch sees God on His throne, he trembles, and falls on his face, his body collapsing: "And great trembling took hold of me, and fear seized me, and my loins were crushed, and my kidneys were loosened,

¹⁶⁹ Johannes Lindblom, *Geshichte und Offenbarungen. Vorstellungen von göttlichen Weisungen und übernatürlichen Erscheinungen im ältesten Christentum* (Lund: Gleerup, 1968), 218–220; Harkins, *Reading with an "I" to the Heavens*, 154–208.

¹⁷⁰ Harkins, *Reading with an "I" to the Heavens*, 38.

and I fell on my face” (1 En 60:3); or again, “And I fell on my face, and all my flesh melted, and my spirit was transformed. And I cried out with a loud voice, with a spirit of power, and I blessed and praised and exalted” (1 En 71:11). Noteworthy is that although this profound and dramatic bodily experience takes place when the seer’s spirit is taken and transferred to heaven (see 1 En 71:1 “[...] my spirit was taken away, and it ascended to heaven”; 1 En 71:5 “And he took my spirit – even me, Enoch – to the heaven of heavens”), the Enochic tradition employs the first-person speech without clarifying whether this experience pertains solely to the spirit (1 En 14:8; 39:3) or also involves the body.¹⁷¹ While Paul affirms, “whether in the body or out of the body I do not know” (2 Cor 12:2–3), the author of the Ascension of Isaiah clearly states that the experience of the heavenly journey entails only Isaiah’s mind: “His mind taken up from him” (6:10).

In Enoch’s feelings of horror and trembling, Christopher Rowland perceives a physical manifestation of the experience of encountering the divine, or, as he suggests, the experience of a human being, presumably the author, who ascended to heaven and incorporated this into Enoch’s ascent account.¹⁷² Scholars also observe that Enoch’s visionary experience is reiterated with a tendency to be imitated. James C. VanderKam notes that Enoch replicates figures from traditions attested in older Mesopotamian divination literature.¹⁷³ According to Kim Harkins, Enoch is a character who imitates an imaginal human visionary, and his vivid visionary experiences can be interpreted as

¹⁷¹ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 341–342.

¹⁷² Cf. Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 232–241.

¹⁷³ VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth*, 52–75; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 67–69. See also, Michael E. Stone, “Enoch’s Revelations?” in *JSP* 31, no. 4 (2022): 249–263. Stone explores the relationship between Enoch’s ontological state and the types of information revealed to him.

invitations to be reprised. Enoch's bodily expressions and the emotional language, presented in the first-person speech, serve as an invitation to be imitated.¹⁷⁴

The transformation from a human to a divine being represents another commonality. Enoch is transformed into an angel of the highest rank to attain God's proximity and to be greeted by Him and His angels as the Son of Man. This narrative is the major theme in the Second Book of Enoch (2 Enoch).¹⁷⁵ Chapters 1–38 vividly describe Enoch's heavenly journey, culminating in his encounter with the divine. The angels guide him to heaven, and ultimately, Enoch becomes an angel. He transforms through his new clothes and the oil with which he is anointed: "And the Lord said to Michael: Go and take Enoch from his earthly garments, and anoint him with my sweet ointment, and put him into garments of my glory. And Michael did thus (...), and I looked at myself, and was like one of his glorious ones" (2 En 22:8–9).¹⁷⁶ Similar passages demonstrating Enoch's participation in glory are found in the Ascension of Isaiah.¹⁷⁷ After leaving behind the body of flesh (7:5), the sage ascends to the presence of God (9:2) to temporarily receive garments reserved for the last days (11:35) and to become like an angel (9:30). Isaiah's transformation into an angel is a prerequisite for his ability to join the heavenly liturgy. The seer participates in this earthly-celestial

¹⁷⁴ Harkins, *Reading with an "I"*, 84–86.

¹⁷⁵ On Enoch's angelification described in 2 En 22:8–9 quoted here, see Andrei A. Orlov, "On the Polemical Nature of 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch*: A Reply to C. Böttrich," *JSJ* 34, no 3 (2003): 274–303, esp. 276–280. The translation of 2 En 22:8–9 is taken from this article. Cf. also, Andrei Orlov, "God's Face in the Enochic Tradition," in *Paradise Now. Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April DeConick (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006), 179–194, here 182–183, note 6; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 38, 43, 85–86; Robert Henry Charles, "The Date and Place of Writing of the Slavonic Enoch," *JTS* 22 (1921): 161–163; André Vaillant, *Le livre des secrets d'Hénoch* (Paris: Institut d'Études Slaves, 1952), iii–v, xiii–xv.

¹⁷⁶ Francis I. Andersen, "2 Enoch. Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Vol. 1*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 91–221, here 136.

¹⁷⁷ Parallels to the visionary's physical transformation during the heavenly journey can be found in Ezekiel and other ascent apocalypses such as the Testament of Levi, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah and the Apocalypse of Abraham.

liturgy before and throughout the vision, as he proclaims, “I fell on my face to worship him” (7:21), “I praised the One” (7:37; 8:23), and “I also was singing praises with them, and my praise was like theirs.” (9:28).

Enochic expressions of emotions (1 En) and the body language employed in Ascls Part One reveal notable similarities. The feeling of fear and the trembling body show a surprising correspondence. Furthermore, the element of the garment, which ensures rewards and transformation, reinforces the idea of the connection between these two visionary traditions. Harkins’s observations about how Enoch’s expressivity can be understood as an invitation to be imitated are thought-provoking, raising questions about the Ascls Part One author’s intent in depicting Isaiah’s trembling body.

Several essential components of visionary traditions appear similar in Enochic and Isaianic documents. This study does not view the literary similarity in these traditions solely as a consequence of the trajectories of divinatory literature and thoughts in the ancient Mesopotamian and Mediterranean world. Enoch’s body’s phenomenal experiences, along with his transformation and communion with angels, suggest that elements of Enochic visionary traditions have been employed by the prophetic guild of the Ascension of Isaiah as numinous narratives to be imitated, reiterated, and re-actualised in liturgical-prophetic assemblies.

2.1.2 Hekhalot Literature

Scholars observe a connection between the Hekhalot mystics and Ascls Part One. Piovanelli suggests interpreting the apocalypse through the lens of the Hekhalot

texts, as they closely align with authentic practices and religious experiences.¹⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Bauckham notes that Ascls Part One is intricately linked to Merkavah mysticism but dismisses its form of reverencing angels.¹⁷⁹ A striking similarity is observed in the setting of Isaiah's vision (Ascls 6) and the vision of R. Nehunya b. Haganah in the renowned section of Hekhalot Rabbati (§§ 198-268). In both cases, the visionary is positioned sitting in the centre of his circle, recounting what he sees. This parallel is particularly significant, as this scene is often assumed to reflect the actual setting of the practice of Merkavah mysticism.

Beyond the common elements present in the settings of the fellows in both visionary accounts, a question arises regarding the potential custom of concomitant worship based on Merkavah material. Was the understanding of Merkavah lore, accessible to rabbinic circles, also available for Jews to explore in liturgical rituals? If so, did the prophetic group of the Ascension of Isaiah draw upon some liturgical patterns rooted in Merkavah mysticism to shape their prophetic liturgy?

Ithamar Gruenwald argues that Merkavah materials were predominantly incorporated into synagogue liturgy, a phenomenon that took place in post-Talmudic times. He supports his claim by suggesting that liturgical poets composed the three forms of the Kedushah mystical elements.¹⁸⁰ The liturgical concept holds that the recitation of the Kedushah, which corresponds to the three daily prayers of the People of Israel for God's descent to His throne in the seventh heaven (Hekhalot Rabbati § 163), aligns with special hymns and the actions of angelic beings.¹⁸¹ Rachel Ellior

¹⁷⁸ Piovavelli, "The *Ascension of Isaiah* as a Jewish Mystical Text", 140.

¹⁷⁹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 142–143.

¹⁸⁰ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 166.

¹⁸¹ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 188.

contends that the harmony between the Kedushah and the actions of angelic beings, ensures that the Kedushah prayed by the celestial congregation of angels and by human worshippers on earth constitutes a shared and unified prayer.¹⁸² The visionary's specific responsibility in this context is to enlighten the community about occurrences in the higher realm only when the Jewish community engages in communal prayer in the lower realm. Thus, the concomitant actions of Merkavah mystics facilitate access to the heavens for those who ascend to the upper world and for those who remain below.

The Kedushah prayer, orchestrated by the visionaries, evokes Scholem's characterisation of the mystical reality depicted in Hekhalot literature. The atmosphere of this reality is defined not by love or tenderness, but by qualities such as sublimity, majesty, fear, and trembling. It is conveyed through prayers and hymns, including the Kedushah, which features a rhythm and repetition of keywords associated with the supernatural, recited to induce a state of ecstasy and accompany the seer on his journey through the heavens.¹⁸³

A similar aura of sublimity and fear is evident in the liturgical ceremony described in Ascls Part One. This sense of sublimity and fear is particularly heightened

¹⁸² Rachel Ellior, "From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions," *JSQ* 4, no. 3 (1997): 217–267, here 230–235.

¹⁸³ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 40–79. For a description of the mystical reality found in Hekhalot literature, see Alexander Altmann, "Shirei Kedushah be-Sifrut ha-Hekhalot ha-Kedu-mah," ed. Edward Robertson and Meir Wallenstein, *Melilah*, Vol. 2 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1946), 1–24; Alexander Altmann, *Panim shel Yahadut – Faces of Judaism: Selected Essays*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1983), 44–67; Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabati," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 149–156; Saul Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim," in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, ed. Gershom Scholem, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 118–126; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 98–126; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 11–37, 359–447; Joseph Dan, "The Religious Experience of the Merkavah," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, Vol. 13, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 289–307; Rachel Ellior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature," *JSQ* 1, no. 1 (1993): 3–53; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. Robert A. Herrera (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1993), 13–44.

by the worship and singing of hymns in “one voice” (9:28), performed simultaneously on earth and in heaven. The hymn chanted to “the God of truth who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints” (6:8) is introduced from the initial stage of the prophetic ritual. Singing hymns and praises remains in the background of the visionary ritual. As Isaiah prophesies, the “door” opens (6:6), which in the Jewish Merkavah literary tradition signifies the beginning or, at least, the potential for a revelation.¹⁸⁴ While “the voice of the Holy Spirit” is heard, it marks the commencement of the revelation to the prophet.¹⁸⁵ After listing the closest prophets seated at Isaiah’s right (6:7),¹⁸⁶ the author describes the liturgical ceremony in which earthly songs connect to celestial ones: “And it came to happen that, when they all heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, they all worshipped on their knees and sang hymns to the God of truth who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints. And they sang hymns to him who had granted such a door in the foreign world, that he had granted it to a human being” (6:8–9). In comparing this ceremony with the hymns sung to those depicted in Hekhalot literature, particularly in the section concerning the Kedushah hymns of Hekhalot Rabbati §§ 94–106,¹⁸⁷ Norelli argues that, aside from the pre-existing liturgical formulae employed by the author of Ascls Part One, literary traces, such as the evocation of the divine name to be worshipped (6:8), resonate with a genuine liturgical experience.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Ezek 1:1; Test. Levi 5:1; 3 En 1:2.10; 8:1; 3 Bar 2:2.5; 3:1, 4:2, 11:2; HekhR § 173, § 247; HekhZ § 420.

¹⁸⁵ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 332. Norelli claims it was a communication of revelation made through the mouth of the prophet.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. above *havurah* episode in HekhR §§ 198–268.

¹⁸⁷ HekhR § 81; § 94; § 106; § 250; §§ 254–257.

The continuity of praise initiated on earth and sustained in heaven underscores another aspect that highlights the similarity between Hekhalot Rabbati and Ascls Part One. The sequence of praises raised by worshippers and celestial beings is noted in Hekhalot Rabbati §§ 152–197. This is a loosely edited collection of texts comprising hymns and guidelines used in heavenly liturgy, many of which reference the Kedushah hymns. One passage emphasises God’s preference for attending to Israel’s prayers over the worship of holy creatures. The earthly-celestial liturgical event is characterised by its dependence on the commencement of the angelic liturgy, which begins only after the human chants have started, as detailed in the “Daily Worship in Heaven and on Earth” narrative (HekhR § 173–175).

In the dialogue between the angel and Isaiah (Ascls 7–11), Norelli notes a similar continuity of praise that began among the prophets (Ascls 6): “‘To whom is this praise directed?’ And he said to me: ‘In the glory of the seventh heaven, to Him who rests in the holy world and to his Beloved’” (7:16–17); and later, “this is the One who is the Highest of the high ones who dwell in the holy world” (10:6).¹⁸⁸ The cult continues after the revelation is communicated by the visionary to “all those who are standing before him” (11:36).

In light of the above insights, the liturgical character of numerous resemblances¹⁸⁹ between Hekhalot literature and Ascls Part One appears considerably more significant than the similarities between the settings of the participants and their functions during the liturgical-prophetic assemblies. Passages evoking divine names and attributes ascribed to the liturgical formula of the Kedushah prayer suggest that

¹⁸⁸ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 338–340.

¹⁸⁹ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 639. Norelli registered forty-five parallels to *Hekhalot Rabbati* and four parallels to *Hekhalot Zutarti*.

the author of the apocalypse explored Merkavah lore to construct the framework of the liturgical ritual. Furthermore, descriptive and numinous narratives originating from Enochic traditions, which were recalled, interpreted, performed, and re-actualised by the worshippers during liturgical-prophetic ceremonies, seem to have triggered experiences of communion with the divine beings. This prophetic ritual was also enriched by the extensive early Christian liturgical material, featuring hymns and songs of Christological significance, as will be analysed further in this Chapter (cf. § 2.3).

2.2 Angelic Liturgy

Collective liturgical practices are also observed in the Qumran discoveries. In recent years, various studies have been undertaken concerning otherworldly religious experiences, or mysticism, in the Scrolls.¹⁹⁰ Scholarly opinions about the extent to which religious experiences can be recovered from the literary texts range from minimalist positions (i.e., objecting to any ascent),¹⁹¹ to maximalist claims (i.e., identifying instances of seers ascending to the heavenly temple). The former view considers Qumran texts as strictly literary sources for historical or literary analysis, while the latter perceives personal transformation within the texts, often referred to as

¹⁹⁰ Philip Alexander, "The Qumran Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite: A Comparative Approach," *RevQ* 22, no. 3 (2006): 349–372, here 349–350. See also, James Davila, "Exploring the Mystical Background of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 433–454, here 434.

¹⁹¹ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 112–153, 348–350; Peter Schäfer, "Communion with the Angels: Qumran and the Origins of Jewish Mysticism," in *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Mystical Approaches to God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, and Stiftung Historisches Kolleg (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006), 37–66..

angelification or apotheosis, and endeavours to envision the religious experience behind these texts in antiquity.¹⁹²

Three groups of texts are essential to this discussion: the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, also known as The Angelic Liturgy,¹⁹³ the Hodayot, and the Self-Exaltation Hymn. These documents attract our attention because scholars debate whether and to what extent a relationship exists between the mystical practices described in these writings from Qumran and Merkavah mysticism in Hekhalot texts, as well as in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses.

Carol Newsom sets the tone for the scholarly tendency of connecting selected compositions from the Dead Sea Scrolls to Merkavah mysticism.¹⁹⁴ She portrays the thirteen-week cycle of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice as a testimony of *communal mysticism* involving angels, practised by the high priests and the fellowship in Qumran.¹⁹⁵ The document consists of thirteen songs, one for each Sabbath in the first quarter of the year. The *maškil* recites the songs in the presence of the community members, referred to in the first person plural voice, whose priesthood resembles that of the angels. The purpose of the recitation was either to perform the songs or to guide the community's singing in a liturgical setting. Newsom proposes that the repetitive performance and communitarian singing entail an otherworldly religious experience among some worshippers.¹⁹⁶ Philip Alexander agrees with Newsom, contending that

¹⁹² Alexander, *Mystical Texts*, 129, vii; Elior, *The Three Temples*, 12–14, 232–244; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 113–120.

¹⁹³ John Strugnell, "The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran – 4QShirot Olat HaShabbat," in *Congress Volume Oxford, 1959*, VTSup 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 318–345.

¹⁹⁴ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 142–146, esp. 142–143.

¹⁹⁵ Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*, HSS 27 (Atlanta, GA: Verlag Scholars Press, 1985), 19.

¹⁹⁶ Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, 14–17.

community members could conceive of heaven as another dimension or parallel universe while worshipping God alongside angels.¹⁹⁷

A similar liturgical notion of communitarian worshipping is observed in Ascls Part One. Prophets convene to participate in their prophetic ceremony, worshipping the divine in harmony and coordination with celestial beings. Ascls evoke the concept of community worshipping, particularly in the phrases, “they (angels) all glorified with one voice” (7:15), and “they (prophets) worshipped on their knees and sang hymns to the God of truth who is holy forever.” (6:10).

The liturgy that implies the performance of the worshippers with divine beings is observed in the Hodayot^a, particularly in the Hymns of the Teacher¹⁹⁸ and the Community Hymns.¹⁹⁹ Although opinions on the function of the Hodayot vary, they were conceivably used in communal worship and daily private devotion.²⁰⁰ The Hodayot contain references to the maškîl, who, as in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, may have served as the liturgical leader, singing hymns and calling for congregational responses and recitations. The first-person singular voice present in some hymns suggests their probable performance by the maškîl. However, the ‘I’ in the text can also represent the members of the community.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Alexander, *Mystical Texts*, 44–54.

¹⁹⁸ See, esp. 1QH^a 11:19–25; 12:24–25.

¹⁹⁹ See esp. 1QH^a 19:3–14.

²⁰⁰ Svend Holm-Nielsen, *Hodayot, Psalms from Qumran*, Acta Theologica Danica 2 (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1960), 348; Eileen Schuller, “Some Reflections on the Function and Use of Poetical Texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Esther Chazon, STDJ 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 173–189; Esther G. Chazon, “The Function of the Qumran Prayer Texts: An Analysis of the Daily Prayers (4Q503),” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years After their Discovery, Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. L. H. Schiffman, E. Tov, and J. C. VanderKam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in cooperation with the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, 2000), 217–225, here 218.

²⁰¹ Svend Holm-Nielsen, *Hodayot, Psalms from Qumran*, Acta Theologica Danica 2 (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1960), 50; Denise Dombkowski Hopkins, “The Qumran Community and 1QHodayot: A Reassessment,” *RevQ* 10, no. 3 (1981): 323–364, here 336–338, 355; Carol A. Newsom, “Apocalyptic Subjects: Social Construction of the Self in the Qumran Hodayot,” *JSP* 12, no. 1 (2001): 3–35, here 13; Seth

The hymn of the *maškil* at the end of the Community Rule (1QS 9:25b–11:15a) envisions a community that transcends a mere assembly engaging in holiness.²⁰² The fragment 1QS 11:7–8 of this hymn suggests that God unites the assembly of the elect with angels: “To those chosen by God, he has given them as an eternal possession, and he has bestowed upon them the lot of the holy ones. With the heavenly beings he has joined their assembly as a council of the community, an assembly of the building of holiness, as an eternal planting.”²⁰³

The idea of life with the angels as a constitutive factor of the fellowship within the Qumran writings compels scholarship to understand the role of community members with the angels in liturgical worship. Although there is no account of the community ascending to heaven, the scenario in which group members envision themselves standing with the angels or even becoming angels²⁰⁴ allows scholars to identify textual references to ascents to heaven in the Hodayot.²⁰⁵ Consequently,

Sanders, “Performative Exegesis,” in *Paradise Now. Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April DeConick (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 57–79, here 75.

²⁰² Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 90; John J. Collins, “Is There Mysticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls?” in *Apocalypticism and Mysticism in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins, Pieter G. R. de Villiers and Adela Yarbro Collins (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 68–69. While Fletcher-Louis suggests that the *יחד* designation, used in the hymn at the end of the Community Rule, may refer even to communion with the angels, Collins contends that “being together” with the angels is the *raison d’être* of the sectarians.

²⁰³ Sarianna Metso, *The Community Rule. A Critical Edition with Translation*, EJI 51 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2019), 57.

²⁰⁴ Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 151.

²⁰⁵ Alexander, *Mystical Texts*, 89–102; Philip Alexander, “Qumran and the Genealogy of Western Mysticism,” in *New Perspectives on Old Texts: Proceedings of the Tenth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 9–11 January 2005*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, Betsy Halpern-Amaru in collaboration with Ruth A. Clements, STDJ 88 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 215–235, here 218–219; Kanagaraj, “Mysticism” in the Gospel of John, 89–103; DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics*, 63; Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 104–112; Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, STDJ 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 274–278; Bilhah Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings,” *JQR* 85, no. 1/2 (1994): 163–183, here 164–167; Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament*. Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 160; Esther Chazon, “Human and Angelic Prayer in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature*, 19–23,

theories regarding communitarian experiences of ascending to heaven have emerged. These theories are mainly founded on passages from hymns suggesting that part of the community, or at least the maškîl, experienced an ascent to heaven during the performance of hymns in liturgical activities.²⁰⁶ Some scholars consider ascent, angelification, and union with the angels in the Hodayot as a means to praise God.²⁰⁷ Others argue that members of the fellowship, while maintaining a continuous state of spiritual discipline and heightened religious sensitivity, did not need to ascend as far as those in the ordinary world.²⁰⁸

The presence of the heavenly ascent motif in the Dead Sea Scrolls has been identified in the 4QSelf-Glorification Hymn^{a-b}. In two recensions of this hymn, i.e., the three Hodayot versions and 4Q491c, a human being is enthroned in the celestial temple, which implies his elevation to heaven.²⁰⁹ In the first recension, the highly exalted speaker states, “I have taken a seat” in the heavens.²¹⁰ The second recension goes even further, and the astonishing and boasting question, “Who is like me among

January, 2000, ed. Esther G. Chazon, STDJ 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 36; Elliot Wolfson, “Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran: A Response to Bilhah Nitzan,” *JQR* 85, no. 1/2 (1994): 185–202.

²⁰⁶ James R. Davila, “Heavenly Ascents in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years. A Comprehensive Assessment*, 2 vols., ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 461–485, here 476–477; Angela Kim Harkins, “Reading the Qumran Hodayot in Light of the Traditions Associated with Enoch,” *Hen* 32, no. 13 (2010): 359–400; Harkins, *Reading with an ‘I’ to the Heavens*, 25–68.

²⁰⁷ Esther G. Chazon, “Liturgical Function in the Cave 1 Hodayot Collection,” in *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited: Texts from Cave 1 Sixty Years after Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Sixth Meeting of the IOQS in Ljubljana*, ed. Daniel K. Falk, STDJ 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 135–149, esp. 139. Chazon identifies ascent form in 1QH^a VII.21–VIII.41, XII.6–XIII.6, and XV. 29–36.

²⁰⁸ Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 103.

²⁰⁹ Angela Kim Harkins, “Self-Glorification Hymn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Second Temple Judaism, Vol. 1*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner, Loren T. Stuckenbruck (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 491–492; Florentino García Martínez, “Old Texts and Modern Mirages: The ‘I’ of Two Qumran Hymns,” in *Qumranica Minora I. Qumran Origins and Apocalypticism*, ed. Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, STDJ 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 105–125.

²¹⁰ Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 86.

the gods [...] who can measure [what issues] from my lips (...)”²¹¹ (4Q471^b 5–6)

suggests that the speaker is superior to the angels.²¹² Scholars debate the speaker’s identity in this hymn,²¹³ and the results of their research lead many to consider the separated origin of the Self-Glorification Hymn (i.e., not composed by the Yahad).²¹⁴

Philip Alexander reckons the speaker’s ascent to heaven and claims that the ascender’s sojourn in heaven implicates his transformation–angelification and probably apotheosis. For Alexander, the verses, “Blessed be God who has seated me among] the [et]ernally blameless (given me) a mighty throne in the angelic council [עֲדַת אֱלִים]. (...) I sit on [high, exalted in hea]ven, and none [su]rround (me). I am reckoned with the angels” (4Q491^c 1 4–7),²¹⁵ indicate the mystical experience of communion between the exalted human and the divine. He also assumes that the ascended narrator is the leader guiding his *communitas* to communion with heaven.²¹⁶ Some scholars consider that, through the liturgical recitation of this hodayah, the fellowship in Qumran may have identified itself with the unusual ‘I’ of the speaker and his religious experience

²¹¹ Translation is taken from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Study Edition*, 2nd ed. (Leiden / New York, NY / Köln: Brill, 1999), 953.

²¹² John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: the Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature*. ABRL (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 138.

²¹³ Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 85–90; Collins, *The Scepter*, 146–149; Martin G. Jr Abegg, “4Q471: A Case of Mistaken Identity?” in *Pursuing the Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. John C. Reeves and John Kampen (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 136–147; Esther Eshel, “The Identification of the Speaker of the Self-Glorification Hymn,” in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich, *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 619–635.

²¹⁴ Eileen Schuller, “The Cave 4 Hodayot Manuscripts: A Preliminary Description,” *JQR* 85, no. 1/2 (1994): 137–150, here 149–150; Esther Eshel, “4Q471b: 4QSelf-Glorification Hymn 9=4QH^e frg. 1?,” in *Qumran Cave 4: Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part 2*, ed. Ester Chazon, Torleif Elgvin, Esther Eshel, Daniel Falk, Bilhah Nitzan, Elisha Qimron, Eileen Schuller, David Seely, Eibert Tigchelaar, and Moshe Weinfeld, *DJD* 29 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 421–432; Collins, *The Scepter*, 148; Angela Kim Harkins, “The Community Hymns Classification: A Proposal for Further Differentiation,” *DSD* 15, no. 1 (2008): 121–154, here 130–131.

²¹⁵ Translation taken from Michael O. Wise, “בְּאֵלִים כְּמוֹנֵי מִי: A Study of 4Q491c, 4Q471b, 4Q427 7 and 1QHa 25:35–26:10,” *DSD* 7, no. 2 (2000): 173–219, here 1883.

²¹⁶ Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 90–91.

and envisioned the potentiality to have access to communion with the divine in the heavenly realm.²¹⁷ Lastly, Kim Harkins argues that the composition was deliberately produced to stimulate worshippers to culminate their singing in the heavens.²¹⁸

In summary, the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, the Hodayot, and the Self-Glorification Hymn (including the Hodayot version) serve as evidence that the notion of present participation in the heavenly realm and human-angel relations was well known during this period. A phenomenal and transformative encounter between a human and the divine, as noted by Harkins in the Hodayot hymns, encompasses various categories. The most noteworthy is the transformation from a human to angelic fellowship.²¹⁹ Furthermore, Philip Alexander considers the speaker of the Self-Glorification Hymn to have been transformed into the angelic company and even apotheosised. In Alexander's view, this numinous song, claiming the conversion and unification of the author with the divine, is part of a larger group of mystical texts. Their "ergative" character, i.e., "*they are meant to be performed*" in liturgical assemblies to assist performers in the appropriation and interiorisation of the text, renders them a means to attain the divine realm. He also argues that visionary apocalyptic literature, even when grounded in descriptive narratives, constitutes numinous texts because, when performed by worshippers in liturgical assemblies, descriptive narratives can potentially transmute description into experience.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 88; Torleif Elgvin, "Temple Mysticism and the Temple of Man," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Texts and Context*, ed. Charlotte Hempel, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 227–242, here 241; Morton Smith, "Ascent to Heavens and Deification in 4QM^a," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin*, ed. L. H. Schiffman, JSPSup 8. Monographs, Series 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 181–188, here 187–188.

²¹⁸ Kim Harkins, *Reading with an "I" to the Heavens*, 15, 36.

²¹⁹ Harkins, *Reading with an "I"*, 30–31.

²²⁰ Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 96 (italics original).

In light of the above examination, common elements between the heterogeneous literature represented by the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ascls Part One are evident. Both traditions feature a collective liturgy that culminates in singing and fosters a sense of communal mysticism, as observed in the liturgical passages of the Scrolls and the descriptions of the liturgical-prophetic ritual found in the Ascension of Isaiah. Another shared element is the concept of human transformation to receive revelation and knowledge, which is observed in Ascls Part One and the Scrolls' documents. The Ascension of Isaiah and these Scrolls represent diverse religious traditions from different authors and communities. The unusual 'I' of the speaker in the Hodayot, composed for communal worship, contrasts with the first-person speech in the narratives of the apocalypse read amid the circle of prophets. Similar liturgical concepts, body language used in narratives, and the idea of transformation into the divine being may represent broader intellectual trajectories and stripes of early Jewish thought, which permeated the larger Jewish society of the Second Temple period. These resemblances also indicate the practice of sharing known religious formulae and generative literary forms from scripture, which might have been performed to engender religious experience and interpreted in new ways to produce new early Jewish and Christian compositions.

2.3 Prophetic Liturgy

Despite the blurred boundaries between early Christian and Jewish literary traditions, scholars have managed to establish connections between the Ascension of Isaiah and Christian works, namely, the preexisting liturgical formula of Isa 57:15a used

in Ascls Part One and found in the Clementine Liturgy, and Hymns having Christological significance in the Book of Revelation.

Although originally not intended for liturgical use, Ascls Part One holds a significant place in the development of early Christian liturgical practices. The narratives of the vision (7:2–11:35) are intricately woven into the depiction of a collective prophetic liturgy (6:1–16; 11:36). Terminology indicating intense prayer, such as “worshipping on knees” and “singing hymns” “in one voice,” underscores the active involvement of the prophets. The diegesis of the prophetic ritual includes passages of hymns whose liturgical use is evidenced in early Christian texts. According to Knibb, the sentences evoking the name of the divinity, the object of the prophets’ worship, “the God of truth who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints” (6:8) and “This is the one who is Highest of the high ones, who dwells in the holy world and rests among the saints” (10:6) provide clear evidence of dependence on LXX Isa 57:15a: Τάδε λέγει κύριος ὁ ὑψιστος ὃ ἐν ὑψηλοῖς κατοικῶν τὸν αἰῶνα ἅγιος ἐν ἁγίοις ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, κύριος ὑψιστος ἐν ἁγίοις ἀναπαυόμενος.²²¹ The passage, “... to know you, who alone rests highest among the highest, holy among the holy (εἰς τὸ γινώσκειν σε τὸν μόνον ὑψιστος ἐν ὑψίστοις, ἅγιον ἐν ἁγίοις ἀναπαυόμενον)” (59:3)²²² from the prayer section of Clement’s letter to the Corinthians,²²³ suggests that this phrase was part of a hymn used in the Christian liturgy. The hymnal formulation, “O Lord Almighty, the Highest, who dwellest on high, the Holy One, that rests among the saints – (Κύριε παντοκράτορ, ὑψιστε ὁ ἐν ὑψηλοῖς

²²¹ Knibb, *Isaianic Traditions*, 639.

²²² Kirsopp Lake, *1 Clement, 2 Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache, Barnabas*, Vol. 1, The Apostolic Fathers (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1912), 1–122, here 111.,

²²³ 1 Clem 34:5–8; 38:3–4; 59:2–61:3.

κατοικῶν, ἅγιε ἐν ἁγίοις ἀναπαυόμενε)” (Const. Apost. 8:11,2),²²⁴ is also supported by the Apostolic Constitutions in the so-called Clementine Liturgy section.²²⁵ Norelli contends that the similarities to Isaiah 57:15a found in 1 Clem 59:3 and Const. Apost. 8.11.2 indicate that the use of Isa 57:15a in early Christian liturgy may have made it suitable for the praise of God in Ascls 6:8 and 7:17.²²⁶

At this juncture, it is important to highlight that while scholarship does not establish a specific set of forms for a prophetic liturgy, sections of prophetic texts often incorporate standard liturgical genres such as hymns and prayer, and are denominated by this term.²²⁷ Given the widespread use of terms with liturgical connotations in the Ascension of Isaiah, including those mentioned above, and the evident utilisation of hymns found in early Christian texts, I propose to designate sections that include terms indicating liturgical genres as prophetic liturgy.

The extent of the influence of Jewish literary and liturgical traditions on the so-called Clementine Liturgy, and consequently on early Christian liturgy, has been a subject of considerable debate among scholars over the past two centuries.²²⁸ One of the liturgical formulae, based on the antiphonal cry of the seraphim, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of glory” (Isa 6:3), and incorporated into the Jewish Kedushah formula, was continuously used in early Christian liturgy: “Holy, holy,

²²⁴ Franz Xaver Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, Vol. 1 (Paderborn: In Libraria Ferdinandi Schoening, 1905), 492.

²²⁵ *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, 8:5–14.

²²⁶ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 337–338.

²²⁷ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature: Interpreting Biblical Texts Series* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 42.

²²⁸ W. C. Unnik, “1 Clement 34 and the ‘Sanctus’,” VC 5, no. 1 (1951): 204–248; W. C. Unnik, “Studies on the so-called First Epistle of Clement,” in *Encounters with Hellenism. Studies on the First Letter of Clement*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Laurence L., Welborn (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 115–180; Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Holy, Holy, Holy: The Story of a Liturgical Formula*. Julius-Wellhausen-Vorlesung, Heft 1 (Berlin / New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2008), 15–36.

holy Lord of Sabaoth! all creation is full of his glory” (1 Clem. 34:6).²²⁹ Therefore, there are compelling reasons to believe that the Kedushah formula inspired the author of Ascls Part One in his design of the dynamic of worshipping in heaven and on earth, as observed earlier in this Chapter (cf. § 2.1.2). The hymn is also part of the Clementine Liturgy, with its fragments found in passages 6:8; 7:16:16–17 and 10:6 of Ascls Part One, which evoke divine names. These findings suggest an influence of the Jewish Kedushah liturgy on early Christian liturgy, establishing the foundation for the worship phase in the prophetic ritual of Ascls Part One.

Noteworthy is that Christian liturgy, perceptible through hymns and songs referring to the figure of the Lord, is a distinguishing feature of the Book of Revelation and is engaged in the genuine apocalyptic mode of the document. Hymns having Christological significance, such as “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Rev 4:8) and songs praising Christ as the Lamb, such as “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and blessing! To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev 5:11–12) indicate the liturgical property of the Apocalypse.²³⁰ Furthermore, praise songs combine the

²²⁹ The potential direct influence of the Kedushah liturgy on the Christian hymn, or its independent emergence through the interpretation of the biblical passage, remains a matter of a significant interest and ongoing scholarly debate. Cf. Bryan D. Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25–45; Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Die altkirchlichen Belege für die synagogale Form des Sanctus (Kedusha/Jes. 6,3; Ez. 3,12),” in *Meilenstein: Festgabe für Herbert Donner zum 16. Februar 1995*, ed. Manfred Weippert and S. Timm, *Ägypten und Altes Testament* 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 172–187; Williamson, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, 16–17.

²³⁰ For the study of Revelation’s Hymns, see Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler, *A Heavenly Chorus. The Dramatic Function of Revelation’s Hymns*, WUNT 2/381 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Gerhard Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism*, NovTSup 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Lucetta Mowry, “Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” *JBL* 71 (1952): 75–84, here 78–80; Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origin and Rhetorical Force*, WUNT 2/167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Russell Morton, “Glory to God and to the Lamb: John’s Use of Jewish and Hellenistic/Roman Themes in Formatting His Theology in Revelation 4–5,” *JSNT* 24, no. 1 (2001): 89–109; Paulo Augusto de Souza Nogueira, “Celestial Worship and

motif of eschatological judgement and rewards to be given to the faithful with thanksgiving and joy. They express: “We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:17–18,) cf. Rev 5:9–10.

The examples of liturgical traditions observed underscore the significance of early Christian liturgy, which, inspired by Jewish liturgical traditions and scripture, is embedded not only in the narratives of the Ascension of Isaiah but also in other early Christian apocalyptic writings. Songs and hymns intertwine with the narratives, whose motif is the revelation of the divine plan to reconstitute the order of the universe. Chants and recitations are attributed to the angelic choirs in heaven and encompass narratives of visionary accounts. The transposition of the pre-existing liturgical formula of Isa 57:15a within the scope of the visionary ceremony seems to reflect a genuine practice of the prophets who, while assembled and inspired by the divine spirit, chanted hymns, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Three. The recitation of the liturgical formula appears to be the experience of readers and performers of the compelling narratives of *Ascls* Part One who were engaged in re-enacting the visionary ritual, as will be illustrated in Chapters Four and Five.

As exemplified above, the elements of the prophetic liturgy in *Ascls* Part One possess characteristics of a ritual or a ceremony. Rappaport’s focus on ritual, which serves as the foundation upon which religion is constructed, aids in observing the

Ecstatic-Visionary Experience,” *JSNT* 25, no. 2 (2002): 165–184; Femi Adedeji, “An Analysis of Selected New Testament Hymns,” *AsJT* 17, no. 2 (2003): 301–314.

actions of the prophets in Ascls Part One as ritual.²³¹ The setting of the assembly features a formal act that resembles one of the lower five levels of heaven. Like a chief angel, the senior prophet occupies the central throne, which in Ascls Part One is king Hezekiah's couch (6:2). The higher-ranking participants, the honoured prophets, sit to the right of Isaiah (6:7). The liturgical actions of speaking words of faith and truth, exchanging prophecies, and the laying on of hands (6:5–6), are not only sequential, but also consistently and determined by the prophets to be performed. The act of worship (6:8–9), which also occurs in sequence with the symbol of open doors, comprises a performance of hymns and divine names voiced by the participants. The arrival of the prophets for the prophetic ceremony, where they are not only aware but also deeply committed to the liturgical and prophetic actions to be undertaken and the ascent to heaven to be achieved (cf. 'Leg' 2:2 in § 4.6.3), underscores the repetitive nature of these ceremonies. The repetitiveness of formal acts, executed in consistent sequences and articulated by the performers, along with the evocation of the numinous experience in "he was seeing a vision" (6:12), are regarded as constitutive elements of a religious ritual. Therefore, I propose to designate the liturgical-prophetic actions described by the author of Ascls Part One as a liturgical-prophetic ritual.

2.4 Ecstatic Prophecy

The account of the ascent to the divine realm, as depicted in Ascls Part One, possesses an ecstatic character noted by scholars, as illustrated in Chapter One (cf. §

²³¹ For Rappaport's definition of a ritual and its entailments, see Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 23–58.

1.4). The vocabulary associated with ecstasy, employed by the author, suggests that the religious experience achieved through the prophetic ceremony is characterised by an ecstatic quality, as will be discussed in Chapter Four (cf. § 4.6). In light of this, questions emerge regarding what qualifies the description of Isaiah's visionary experience as ecstatic and what the roots of ecstatic prophecy are, grounded in the Jewish and early Christian prophetic traditions that influenced the author of *Ascls Part One*.

Prophets and prophecy played a central role in early Christianity. The self-understanding of the Christian movement was its realised messianism, authenticated by the visionary experiences of seers who communicated eschatological conviction. The visions claimed by prophets to have been received, as a result of their experiences of the divine, served as instruments for understanding the meaning of eschatology. For instance, in the Johannine Gospel, Jesus states that he has seen and heard from the Father (John 6:46; 8:26.40).²³² The book of Revelation, as noted below, is referred to as prophecy.²³³ The Acts of the Apostles indicate that prophets and teachers were part of circles of the Antiochian communities' authorities (Acts 13:1; 15:32). The Acts of the Apostles indicate that prophets and teachers were part of the authorities within the Antiochian communities (Acts 13:1; 15:32). The Didache establishes ethics and liturgical norms for prophets and sets criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophets (Did. 11). It also affirms the central role of prophets in the eucharistic assembly (Did. 10:7).²³⁴

²³² Christopher Rowland, "Apocalypticism," in *The Biblical World*, ed. Katharine J. Dell. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 172–188, here 180–181.

²³³ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, xvi.

²³⁴ For an examination of the different stages of early Christian prophecy, see Ulrich Luz, "Stages of Early Christian Prophetism," in *Prophets and Prophecy in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, Korinna Zamfir and Tobias Nicklas, WUNT 2/286 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 57–75.

The ecstatic aspects of religious experience are particularly palpable in Paul's writings.²³⁵ It is featured by its emissary role for individuals and religious groups. In the communities established by Paul, prophetic activity was cultivated in liturgical settings, and Paul considered establishing guidelines for such practices (1 Cor 12–14). This prophetic activity was marked by an inspired interpretation of biblical texts and traditions, and an ecstatic character.²³⁶ Prophets were expected to interpret both scripture and tradition.

The Book of Revelation exemplifies early Christian prophecy by merging scriptural interpretation with tradition. This work presents an account of a visionary experience, using language that suggests an ecstatic vision.²³⁷ The author of the apocalypse, the seer of Patmos, carries out the prophecy with the aid of a living apocalyptic tradition.²³⁸ Although the apocalypse does not formally quote scripture, it weaves a rich tapestry of scriptural reminiscences and allusions.²³⁹ In contrast to the Letters of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles, where references to Christian prophecy are minimal, Revelation claims its prophetic status (Rev 1:2; 22:7,10; 22:18–19),

²³⁵ Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sebastiana Maria Silva Nogueira, *Viagens aos céus e mistérios inefáveis: a religião de Paulo de Tarso* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2016); Daniel Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: De Gruyter/Magnes Press, 2018), 80–81.

²³⁶ Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 185–194.

²³⁷ David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, ed. David E. Aune, WUNT 199 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 65; Jörg Frey, "'Mystical' Traditions in an Apocalyptic Text?," 109.

²³⁸ Luca Arcari, "L'Apocalisse di Giovanni nel quadro di alcune dinamiche gruppali proto-cristiane: elementi per una (ri-) contestualizzazione," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 28, no. 1 (2011): 137–183, esp. 168–180; Enrico Norelli, "Profezia e politica nella ricezione antica dell'Apocalisse: Ippolito e Vittorino di Petovio," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 25 (1999): 315–346, here 315–316; Luca Arcari, "I profeti nella comunità Cristiana (I secolo)," *Parola, Spirito e Vita* 41: *La profezia* (2000): 147–172.

²³⁹ Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Jörg Frey, "'Mystical' Traditions in an Apocalyptic Text?: The Throne Vision of Revelation 4 within the Context of Enochic and Merkavah Texts," in *Apocalypticism and Mysticism in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins, Pieter G. R. de Villiers and Adela Yarbro Collins (Berlin / Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2018), 103–128, esp. 112.

characterises the activity of its author as a prophet (Rev 10:11) and addresses communities where Christian prophets play a vital role (Rev 2:20; 11:18; 6:9).

Despite indications of the ecstatic nature of prophetic activity in the communities founded by Paul, as well as language suggesting that the prophet of Patmos achieved the vision in the Book of Revelation through ecstasy, the scholarly perspective on early Christian prophecy is marked by scepticism regarding its significant ecstatic element. Consequently, similar to the debates surrounding Jewish prophecy, the discussion regarding the role of prophecy within an ecstatic religious experience in early Christian traditions is divided among scholars who accept and those who reject prophecy as an ecstatic experience.²⁴⁰ This issue, as Jan Bremmer states, requires re-evaluation.²⁴¹

Philo portrays the prophet's performance in unequivocally ecstatic terms.²⁴² He employs the term *ἀγνοια*, which signifies an unawareness of what is being pronounced, thereby indicating a state of absence of mind. The setting of the reason (*ἡ δύσις τοῦ λογισμοῦ*) and the evicted mind (*ἐξοικίζεται ὁ νοῦς*) are replaced in the process of inspiration (*ἐνθουσιᾷ*) and possession (*ἐνθεος*) by the spirit (*πνεύματος*), which causes ecstasy (*ἔκστασιν*) and inspired madness (*θεοφόρητον μανίαν*). As Bori observed: "The common points with the description of ecstasy with the Ascls 6 cannot be unnoticed, especially as regards the loss of discursive faculty (*διαλογισμός*), that is the want of perception (*ἄγνοια*), in which the visionary finds himself in front of the «Other»."²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 186, note 116.

²⁴¹ Bremmer, "The Domestication of Early Christian Prophecy", 18.

²⁴² Cf.: Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.65; 4; Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 259. 264–265

²⁴³ Bori, *L'estasi*, 381.

The break in personality, described by Philo as the loss of discursive faculty and eviction of mind (*νοῦς*), can be noticed in the enrapture of Isaiah's mind, "his mind was taken up from him" (6:10), and "the mind of his flesh was raised up from him" (6:11). The want of perception, indicated by Philo as the unawareness of what is being pronounced, can be observed in Isaiah's behaviour, "he himself could not see the men who were standing in front of him. And his eyes were open" (6:10b–11a).

The ecstatic vocabulary in Ascls 6:10–12, which implies an ecstatic experience, is grounded in the tradition of ecstatic prophecy. At least two components of Isaiah's visionary account reflect its ecstatic religious character: the enrapture of Isaiah's mind and his want of perception.

Conclusion

Various social groups among early Jews and Christians were involved in interpreting the shared traditions of the mystical texts. They applied them for their specific needs, and developed particular practices, which varied from community to community. The current Chapter demonstrates the remarkable factors, motifs and ideas brought by the period's literary traditions, applied by the authors of the writing to stimulate religious practices in the community of the Ascension of Isaiah. These traditions may have interpreted the religious experiences and have compelled phenomenal and transformative encounters with the divine. The study highlights those textual sources which have directly or indirectly inspired collective practices triggering processes to produce the ascent and conceivable seer's encounter with the divine. This Chapter also observes the ensemble of concepts, factors, and mechanisms inherited

from early Jewish and Christian currents, facilitating the body and mind processes of the individuals in the past toward an alternate state of consciousness.

Among the elements rooted in early Christian and Jewish traditions that inspired communitarian practices for engendering a visionary experience are the following: (1) numinous narratives from the Enochic traditions, where body language signifies a phenomenal experience of the divine and the potential for transformation into a heavenly being; (2) ergative songs and hymns from the Qumran discoveries, which, when performed in community, could compel worshippers to ascend to heaven, transform and attain communion with divine beings; (3) the liturgical formula of Kedushah, rich with hymns and divine names from the early Christian liturgy, which shaped the content of the liturgical-prophetic ritual; (4) the concept of a cult on earth and in heaven in *communitas* of prophets, aimed at bridging the gap between the human and divine realms while aspiring to angelic likeness; and (5) the role of prophecy and the leading role of prophets within early Christianity, whose defining characteristics were visionary experiences and encounters with the divine.

Amid the compelling themes, factors, and mechanisms supporting the development of visionary practices mediated by the body of the visionary, several are identified. First, there are the motifs of conversion from a human to a divine being and the emotional disturbances caused by this transformation, inherited from Merkavah mysticism. Second, there is the factor of religious experience that germinates through the practice of ecstatic prophecy, which a visionary attains. Among these processes is a break in personality accompanied by absent-mindedness, both of which are crucial for an ascent to heaven to occur.

This compound of elements, identified through an examination of the traditions from which they originate, also represents what is understood about the religious experience as depicted in the Ascension of Isaiah. These components stimulated the community and individuals behind Ascls Part One to develop the means to achieve the eschatological dream. The following Chapter addresses the passages of Ascls Part One that portray the members of the prophetic circle celebrating prophetic events in *communitas* with heavenly beings and, as such, cultivating the realised eschatology. The examinations undertaken allow one to observe how the communities and individuals in the past were compelled to encounter the divine through collective means and stimulated by somatic and cognitive processes.

Chapter Three: Visionary Experience in the Course of the Prophetic Cult on Earth and in Heaven

Introduction

This Chapter explores the external factors influencing the visionary, which contributed to the generation of visionary experiences, as observed in Ascls Part One. The signs noted in the text are examined as indications of religious experience. This investigation is bolstered by insights into the elements of early Jewish and Christian visionary and prophetic traditions that inspired the community and individuals behind Ascls Part One to pursue the eschatological dream, as underscored in Chapter Two.

In this Chapter, I make the case that Ascls Part One is the sign and image of liturgical events conducted by the early Christian community. Passages 6:1–7:1 and 11:36–39 indicate that the members of the prophetic circle celebrate these prophetic events in *communitas*, through which they encounter the divine. I argue that the repetitive and performative celebrations of the prophetic ritual in *communitas* compelled the ancient authors and the prophetic circle behind the writing towards a visionary experience and an encounter with the divine.

A compound of methods from ritual studies is applied to address the signs of the encounter with the divine in Ascls Part One, which are located *outside* the visionary. Roy A. Rappaport's theories of ritual actions, a cornerstone of our

understanding of ritual religious practice, are employed to examine the state of the group and the integration of discursive and non-discursive elements in ritual performance. These theories facilitate an inquiry into how the community of prophets perceives religious practice as a religious experience in our writing. The concept of *communitas*, introduced by Rappaport in his studies, deepens our understanding of how the prophets' participation in the harmonious practice of congregational ritual not only integrates them but also reveals the divine. Pierre Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* enhances our insight into the phases of prophetic ritual, which fosters a "state of body" and embodied subjective experience in the prophets.

This Chapter first examines how the actions during the introductory part of the ritual prepare the members of the ceremony to accept the state of larger order, which is the assembly's unity. Passage 6:3–7, analysed in the context of early Jewish and Christian traditions and through the lenses of concepts from ritual studies, reveals the profound impact of preparatory rituals on practitioners, influencing both their minds and bodies. The following subsection analyses how the coordinated and harmonious actions of earthly-heavenly worship foster a profound sense of unity in the bodies of the prophets. This unity, experienced by the prophets, encompasses both themselves and the cosmos, creating a feeling of oneness. Passages 6:8–9, 7:15–17, 9:28, and 11:36, interpreted through the anthropological perspective of the concept of *communitas* and in light of the visionary and liturgic traditions of early Christians and Jews, demonstrate how the community of prophets, in their collective experience, encounters the divine.

3.1 “Words of faith and truth” – Reciting to Prepare and Inspire

In sections 6:1–12 and 11:36, the author describes the prophetic assembly that evolves into a liturgic ceremony. This gathering occurs in the fictional setting of Hezekiah’s palace in Jerusalem, which exhibits a liturgical character, as indicated by the liturgical-prophetic activities undertaken by the prophets. They take part in a discourse (6:3a, 6a), prophesy and hear the prophecy (6:5), lay on hands (6:5), worship on their knees (6:8), and sing hymns in one voice with the celestial beings in heaven (6:8–9; 7:15–17; 10:6; 11:36).

The prophetic ritual begins after the two main characters, Isaiah and Hezekiah, are introduced to the royal setting in Jerusalem. The ceremony commences with a significant exchange of words between the key figures.

Note the occurrence of this phrase in the following traditions:

6:3a

‘E’: When Isaiah began to speak with King Hezekiah, the words of faith and truth (ἡΓC ሃይማኖት ወጽድቅ – *nagarā hāyemānotā waṣədəqə*) (...).

6:6

‘E’: When he spoke with Hezekiah words of truth and faith (ἡΓC ት ጽድቅ ወሃይማኖት – *nagarata ṣədəqə wahayemānotā*) they all heard the door that he opened.

‘S’: And when he spoke the words of truth (слова истины – *slovesa istinīnaja*) the Holy Spirit came upon him and they all saw and heard the voice of the Holy Spirit.

‘L’²: He then spoke the words of truth (uerba ueritatis). The Holy Spirit came upon him, and all saw and heard the words of the Holy Spirit.

While the text does not explicitly reveal the content of these “words,” the context of the meeting, which leads to the chief prophet’s otherworldly journey and vision, suggests they refer to the sessions of Merkavah mystics. A point of interest is the so-called fellowship account provided in sections §§ 198–268 of Hekhalot Rabbati.

In this episode, R. Ishmael convenes all the renowned rabbis and makes them sit in circles. In the middle of them, Rabbi Nehunya ben Haqanah explains how to ascend to and descend from the heavenly Merkavah. The preparatory stages anticipate his ascent, while the recitation of hymns, songs, prayers, and the names of God and angels marks the phase that introduces the ascension.²⁴⁴ The numinous phrases recited in a rhythmic voice, along with hymns sung by the visionaries, likely in a high tone and employing poetic and hymnic diction, are perceived as a mystical prayer. This mystical prayer is believed to create an atmosphere of inspiration that either induces the vision or accompanies the visionary on his otherworldly journey.²⁴⁵

A passage in Ma'aseh Merkavah exemplifies a mystical prayer in which Rabbi Akiva instructs Rabbi Yishmael on how to attain a vision. This instruction unfolds through a dialogue designed to protect the visionary and fortify him against the “adventures” he would encounter during the heavenly journey.²⁴⁶ Since many hymns performed in the sessions of Merkavah mystics take the form of dialogues, and given that the ‘E’ version mentions that “he [Isaiah] spoke with Hezekiah” (ܬܢܝܠ ܟܝܬܝܢܐ – *tanāgara māṣəla Ḥəzəqəyāsə*) (6:6), it is plausible to propose that the utterances of the “words” in 6:3a and 6:6 represent a unique form of dialogue between the visionary and Hezekiah. Consequently, the “words of faith and truth” exchanged between Isaiah and Hezekiah were not merely a prayer but a grand and sublime supplication, rich with elements such as charms, magical seals, incantations (or hymns), and utterances of “strange names,” all of which describe the Merkavah sphere.

²⁴⁴ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 270–276.

²⁴⁵ Scholem, *Mejor Trends*, 62.

²⁴⁶ Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981), § 33, 116.

In the broader context of the preparatory phase of the ritual in Ascls 6, it is noteworthy that a visionary is implicitly engaged in actions of weeping, mourning, and fasting for a specific number of days. This dedication is crucial to the preparatory ritual for the heavenly ascent.²⁴⁷ While Ascls Part One does not explicitly mention these actions, Ascls 2:9–11 affirms that many “believers / faithful” willingly immerse themselves in long-lasting ascetic fasting practices as part of the ritual to achieve visionary experiences, which will be discussed in Chapter Five (cf. § 5.3).

This preparatory stage opens up for introducing prophets into the meeting and establishing the prophetic assembly. The author gradually incorporates other characters into the backdrop during the ritual dialogue between Isaiah and Hezekiah (6:3b–7). While the entire phrase (6:3a) is absent in ‘S’ and ‘L²’, these versions also refrain from including Hezekiah as the speaker of the words in 6:6 (see above). Through the anaphora in 6:6, which refers to the “words of faith and truth” spoken in 6:3, the author appears to emphasise the significance of this utterance within the liturgical-prophetic ritual. Furthermore, the analepsis in 6:3b, which recalls the earlier arrival of the prophets, underscores their inclusion during the prayer of the “words.” The author seeks to highlight the speech of the “words of faith and truth” among the prophets who have gathered from their respective communities for the collective prophetic practice.

Observe the literary resources employed to introduce the prophets:

6:3b

‘E’: (...) all the princes of Israel sat down, the eunuchs and the kings’ counsellors, there were

‘S’: (...) and all the princes of Israel, the royal counsellors and the eunuchs stood

‘L²’: (...) and all the princes of Israel, and the king's counsellors, and the eunuchs,

²⁴⁷ Schäfer, *Synopse*, § 11, § 33, § 299. Cf. 4 Ezra 5:13–20; 6:31–35; 9:24, 12:51; Dan 10,2–3; 2 Bar 9:2.

forty prophets and sons of prophets they had come (መድኃኑ – *mada'u*) from the neighbouring village (እምደያም – 'əmə 'adayama), the mountains (ወእምደባር – *wa'əmə 'adabārə*), and the countryside (ወእምደሐቁል – *wa'əmə 'ahəqul*) when they heard that Isaiah had come from Gilgal to Hezekiah.

before him. And came (придоша же – *pridoša že*) from the villages and the fields and the mountains (из всѣхъ и отъ сѣль и горъ – *iz vŕsei i ot sel'i sŭ gorŭ*), and the prophets and the sons of the prophets, when they heard that Isaiah had come from Gilgal to Hezekiah.

were standing before him; and the prophets and the sons of the prophets came (ueneruntque) from all villages (ex omnibus uillis et agris et montibus), and fields, and mountains, when they heard that Isaiah had come from Galgatha to Hezekiah.

'Leg': And when Somnas, the scribe, and Asur, the memorialist, heard that the great Isaiah was coming from Gilgal to Jerusalem, and with him forty sons of prophets (τεσσαράκοντα υἱοὺς προφητῶν) and his own son Josab, they announced his coming to Hezekiah (1:3).

6:4

'E': And they had come (መድኃኑ – *wamadə'u*) to greet him and to hear his words (ይስምዑ ነገሩ – *yəsəmə'u nagarato*).

'S': to greet him.

'L²': to salute him.

The dialogue between Isaiah and Hezekiah, which later involves prophets, is a key element of the preparatory phase of the prophetic ritual. Although the dialogue's length is not specified, the context of similar Merkavah rituals implies it was a lengthy process. Characterised by its incantatory nature, this dialogue serves a theurgic purpose, with the "words" recited in a rhythmic tone. Scholars note that the mystical prayers, heightened by weeping, lamentation, and sleep deprivation, may reflect a religious aspect of the altered state.²⁴⁸ Yet, while the ritual acts that initiate attempts to achieve organic effects are often straightforward to observe, the subsequent neural

²⁴⁸ Michael E. Stone, "Seeing and Understanding in 4 Ezra," in *Revealed Wisdom. Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, ed. John Aston (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill 2014), 122–136; Daniel Merkur, "The Visionary Practices of Jewish Apocalypticists," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society 14: Essays in Honor of Paul Parin*, ed. L. B. Boyer and Simon A. Grolnick (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic, 1989), 125.

and cognitive processes are intricate and concealed, posing a significant challenge for direct observation.²⁴⁹ Therefore, I postpone the analysis of the implications of the preparatory phase for the gathering participants until Chapter Four, where the internal components of the visionary experience are addressed, and the explicit mention of the preparatory ritual mourning is discussed in Chapter Five (cf. § 5.3).

It is noteworthy that the prophets who actively engage in this mystical prayer are driven by specific objectives until the vision concludes (11:36). In 6:5, the author outlines additional elements of the ritual, including 1) the laying on of hands, illustrated by “he might put his hand on them (ያንብር እዴሁ – *yānəbərə ’ədehu*),” and 2) exchanging prophecies, expressed as “they prophesy (ወከመ ይትነበዩ – *wakama yəṭənaba*),” and “that he (might) hear the prophecy (ወከመ ይስማዕ ትንቢቶሙ – *wakama yəsəmā’ə tənəbitomu*).” Furthermore, the prophets are depicted as being “before” (ቅድመ – *qədəma*) Isaiah (6:5, 7). Through this, the author emphasises the inclusion of the prophets in the act of praying the “words.”

Note the occurrence of these elements in the ‘E’ tradition:

6:5

‘E’: And that he might put his hand on them (ያንብር እዴሁ – *yānəbərə ’ədehu*) and that they prophesy (ወከመ ይትነበዩ – *wakama yəṭənaba*) and that he (might) hear the prophecy (ወከመ ይስማዕ ትንቢቶሙ – *wakama yəsəmā’ə tənəbitomu*); and all were before (ቅድመ – *qədəma*) Isaiah.

‘S’: and also to announce to him the things that would happen
(ω χωταψινηνιχъ быти
- *o chotęstinichŭ būti*).

‘L²’: and to announce to him was to happen
(que uentura errant).

²⁴⁹ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Cultural Anthropology 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113.

Although the main clause, “they all heard the door which he opened” (6:6b), marks the beginning of another part of the event, passage 6:7 provides further details about the composition of the liturgical assembly. Two groups of characters, along with Isaiah, before whom they stood (6:5), gather for the liturgical ritual. The ‘E’ version explicitly distinguishes between Isaiah, “all the prophets (ነቢያተ ክሉሙ – *nabiyāta kʷəllomu*),” and “all the people (ወክሉ ሕዝብ – *wakʷəllə həzəba*).” In contrast, the ‘S’ and ‘L²’ versions omit the reference to “people.”

Observe the tripartite division of individuals in the assembly according to the ‘E’ tradition:

6:7

‘E’: And the king convoked all the prophets (ነቢያተ ክሉሙ – *nabiyāta kʷəllomu*), and all the people (ወክሉ ሕዝብ – *wakʷəllə həzəba*) that congregated there, and Micah, old Ananias, Joel, and Josab came and sat at his right (በየላሁ – *bayamānu*).

‘S’: The king summoned him and all the prophets, and as many of them as they were there together entered: there were Micah and Ananias the old man, Joel and those who sat on his right and left (ዐደርከዐሃቤ ዝ ዐሠዐሃቤ ዓደሪ – *odesnoju i ošujuju jego*).

‘L²’: The king called him and the prophets to him, and they all went in, all who had been there together. Then there were Micah and old Ananias, Joel and all of them who were to his right and to his left (a dextris sius et a sinistris).

The depiction of the prophets evokes the setting of the *havurah* episode, where fellow rabbis sit *in front* of him, observing the phenomena related to Rabbi Nehunya’s descent into the Merkavah, while the other disciples stand (cf. §2.1.2).²⁵⁰ Although this passage is the only one in Hekhalot literature that attests to a similarity in both traditions of a collective setting culminating in a heavenly journey,²⁵¹ Michael Stone

²⁵⁰ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 95; Schäfer, *Synopsis*, §§ 203.

²⁵¹ Marta Himmelfarb, “Mysteries and Revelations”, in *Mysteries and Revelations: Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, ed. John J. Collins –James H. Charlesworth. JSP.SS 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1991), 87.

identifies a recurring distinction among three groups of characters involved in visionary experiences in Ascls 6, 4 Ezra (vision 7), and 2 Baruch. He suggests that this repetitive threefold division of participants is a reflection of the authors' actual social situation in the original communities of these writings, where the author, recognised as a prophet, played a significant role.²⁵² This observation, along with a similar threefold division of characters in four distinct early Jewish and Christian literary traditions, indicates a pattern of prophetic assemblies that celebrated ecstatic experiences in small gatherings. In Ascls Part One, this pattern is evident in the setting of the prophets, "all were before (ቅድመ – *qədəma*) Isaiah" (6:5), as recounted in the 'E' version, and by the proximity of the prophets closest to the seer, who sit "at his right (በየግኑ – *bayamānu*)" (6:7). All versions of the Ascension of Isaiah support this point. Furthermore, the distinction between "all the prophets" and "all the people" (6:7), along with Isaiah, a prominent prophet, makes it reasonable to consider that the tripartite division of individuals in the assembly indicates that the prophetic ritual in Ascls Part One is part of a broader tradition of prophetic assemblies.

The connection of the liturgical-prophetic assembly from Ascls Part One to a wider tradition of prophetic gatherings, along with its potential for recurrence, can also be inferred from the expectations of activities to be carried out and the participants' adherence to a specific systematic procedure, as narrated in 6:5: "he might put his hand on them (...) they prophesy (...) he (might) hear the prophecy." The rites of laying on of hands and prophesying transcend mere ritual; they fulfil significant, meaningful roles within the context of the assembly.

²⁵² Michael E. Stone, "On Reading an Apocalypse," in *Mysteries and Revelations. Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, ed. John J. Collins – J. H. Charlesworth, JSP.SS 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 65–78, here 75–77.

Questions about the meaning of the ritual of laying on of hands and the exchange of prophecies for the development of the prophetic assembly intersect with concerns about the implications of these activities for the mood and consciousness of the practitioners. Both rituals could potentially contribute to shaping the religious experiences of their participants.

The ritual of laying on of hands, a practice that transcends religious boundaries, is found in both Jewish and Christian traditions. It is used in various contexts, such as blessing, healing, sacrifices, ordination, and commissioning.²⁵³ In the Jewish environment, the rite finds its function concretely in the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor, which denotes transference of Mosaic authority (Deut 31:7; 34:9), while in Num 27:12–23.14–15.23 Joshua already has the spirit and authority of Moses. It is also generally recognised that Rabbinic literature encompasses a selected written and oral literary pre-Tannaitic heritage from the first-century CE.²⁵⁴ Particularly noteworthy is the textual evidence of applying to the sign of laying on of hands in the context of blessing,²⁵⁵ and Rabbinic Ordination (*Semikah*),²⁵⁶ which originated with R. Yohanan ben Zakkai. In its initial phase, the rite is considered a private affair between a Rabbi and a student, when each Rabbi would ordain his students to ensure his succession to Moses' line.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ John F. Tipei, *The Laying on of Hands in the New Testament*. A Ph.D. Thesis (University of Sheffield, 2000).

²⁵⁴ Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited. Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Eerdmans 2010), 26–27.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Sopherim (18.5) and Mishnah (m.Sotah 7.6; m.Tam 7.2).

²⁵⁶ Tipei, *The Laying on of Hands*. Tipei claims that Jewish ordination involving the laying on of hands rite was practised in the first century CE. He references five Rabbinic texts from the Mishnaic tractate Sanhedrin: M. San. 4.4; T. Sanh. 1.1; Y. Sanh. 19a; B. Sanh. 13b; B. San. 13b.

²⁵⁷ Cf. y.Sanh. I, 19a.

The early Christian literary traditions, meanwhile, place a profound emphasis on the laying on of hands as a conduit for the prophetic spirit, even before it is applied to the ordination.²⁵⁸ Moreover, given the closest context of 6:5 to the “voice of the Spirit” heard by the members of the assembly (6:6.8.10), the rite might be understood as a means of transmitting the Holy Spirit, which empowers the prophets to prophesy, further underscoring its significance.²⁵⁹

In summary, it is plausible to consider both the Rabbinic concept and the early Christian idea as the background of the implicit use of the “laying on of hands” (ܥܕܢܐ ܠܝܕܝܐ – *yānābārā ’adehu*) (6:5) in the Ascension of Isaiah. This ritual, a transformative experience, ensures the succession to Moses’ line through laying on hands, undertaken by the leader of prophets to his disciples. The Holy Spirit transmitted through the ritual enables the prophets to prophesy. Such an understanding of “laying on of hands” underscores the weight of its implications. In their ritual journey, the participants believe they are next in the succession to see the divine as Moses saw and to ascend to the heavens as the early Tannaim entered the *Pardes*. They also believe they are entrusted with the divine inspiration to prophesy, which consists of transmitting the message that is announced and heard. Their belief, empowered by ritualised actions undertaken in a community of prophets, produce in them not only a “state of mind” but a “state of body”, as Bourdieu claims in his idea of *habitus*. They learn through their bodies that they can encounter the divine and transmit the message. The reproduction of the gesture of laying on of hands is a practical reactivation, which takes place in the body. Since the bodies of the participants believe in what gesture is

²⁵⁸ Acts 6:6; 19:6; Ign. Phld. 10:1; Ign. Smyrn. 11:2; Did. 15:1; Ign. Pol. 7:2.

²⁵⁹ For parallel texts, see 2 Kings 13:16–17, and Acts 19:6, where Paul lays hands on twelve disciples: “and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”

played on them, this is not a knowledge of being visionaries they have, but something that they are.²⁶⁰

Having examined the transformative effects of the laying on of hands in initiating the celestial journey, we now turn our attention to the intriguing practice of exchanging prophecies; one of the most captivating and intriguing aspects of the liturgical-prophetic assembly is the exchange of prophecies. The exchange of prophecies is a practice in Merkavah mysticism in which a disciple explains to Rabbi the master lines of the redemptive intervention of God and, subsequently, listens to his account of visionary experiences. This practice is not uncommon in Merkavah mysticism of the first century CE. Scholars recall early Rabbinic literature, specifically the passages of Mishnah and Tosefta Tractate Hagigah, which contain a dialogue between Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai and his disciple Rabbi Ele'azar ben Arakh. In this dialogue, Yohanan ben Zakai requests his disciple, Ele'azar ben Arakh, to explain a chapter of the Ma'aseh Merkavah. Beyond an overt intention to limit the disciple's liability of accessing secret knowledge before he has reached a proper age and education, scholars observe that the text provides evidence of the methods used for teaching and transmitting the Merkavah doctrine.²⁶¹ In this method, the roles are reversed, evidencing that the disciple explains and the master listens. Yet brilliant theoretical knowledge and exposition of the Merkavah doctrine were not enough to obtain the approval of such masters. The disciple's presentation needed to be based on

²⁶⁰ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 73.

²⁶¹ For the requirements a sage needed to fulfil in order to explore the Merkavah, see Federico Dal Bo, "'A Sage Understands of His Knowledge' (mHag 2:1). Degrees and Hierarchy of Knowledge in Abraham Abulafia," *Mediaevalia. Textos e Estudos* (2017): 63–76.

a visionary experience that guaranteed certainty.²⁶² There are reasons to believe that it is not a unique occurrence but a normal process.

When we consider the setting of the rite in the *havurah* account parallel to the ritual in Ascls Part One, it becomes apparent that the exchange of prophecies in 6:5 serves as a means for the master to approve the prophets' active participation in the ritual. The author of Ascls Part One uses "hear the prophecy" (ወክመ ይስማኑ ትንቢቶሙ – *wakama yəsəməʾā tənəbitomu*) to refer to the story of the vision, i.e., the visionary experience that encompasses the normative strand about God's redemptive intervention. This understanding of the prophecy in 6:5 is crucial to comprehend the expectation of the prophets to listen to the visionary's experience and to be listened to by him, thereby highlighting the active role of the prophets in this ritual exchange.

In conclusion, the author of the visionary account of the Ascension of Isaiah presents a preparatory phase of the ritual that draws from the profound elements of Merkavah mysticism. This phase unfolds in a fictional setting of the royal palace in Jerusalem, where prophets gather for a meeting. The phase commences with a mystical prayer, a dialogue between two key characters of the story, gradually involving other individuals. While the author does not specify the duration and nature of the preparatory phase, the context of similar practices of the period suggests it was a lengthy process designed with theurgic purposes. Mourning and fasting practices are considered at this stage, as highlighted in the similar communitarian experiences in Ascls Part Two (cf. §5.3). This process aimed to induce an altered state of consciousness in its practitioners, underscoring the profound and intense nature of the experience.

²⁶² Nicolas Sed, *La mystique cosmologique juive*. Études Juives 16 (Paris: Édition de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Mouton, 1981), 11–18.

The threefold division of the members during the assembly, which includes Isaiah, the closest prophets to him, and people, indicates that the structure of the meeting in Ascls Part One is akin to visionary meetings observed in four early Jewish literary traditions. This observation leads to the inference that the ritual stages during the prophets' assembly are rooted in the tradition of prophetic assemblies that celebrated ecstatic experiences in small groups.

The author of Ascls 6 brings to light the laying on of hands and the exchange of prophecies as the transformative rites in which the members of the prophetic assembly were to participate. Despite this, Ascls Part One does not provide explicit descriptions of the actions related to these rituals. This omission could be attributed to various factors, such as the assumption of the reader's familiarity with the ritual or the focus on other aspects of the narrative. The exchange of prophecies, known in Merkavah mysticism as the practice of teaching and transmitting the Merkavah principle, holds significant importance. It serves as a means for the prophets in Ascls 6 to learn the doctrine about God's redemptive intervention. The laying on of hands, a ritual deeply rooted in Jewish and early Christian traditions, is a highly transformative experience for the prophets. Through the reproduction of the gesture of laying on of hands, the prophets reactivate in their bodies the conviction of being qualified for ascending to heaven and encountering the divine.

The ritual practices that aimed to stimulate the prophets' minds and bodies initiated a new phase of the ceremony, which fostered religious experiences.

3.2 “In one voice” – Worshipping on Earth and in Heaven

The author of the narrative indicates in 6:6 a phenomenon of the “door opened” while Isaiah and Hezekiah keep their mystical prayer, which initiates a new phase of the ritual – worshipping. During this phase, the visionary ascends to heaven, 6:10–12, has a heavenly journey, 7:2–11:35, is received by the worshippers and recounts the vision while the practitioners keep worshipping, 11:36. As such, the worshipping phase lasts until the end of the ritual. Once again, the author is not concerned about detailing the period in which worshipping lasts. Only *Legenda Greca* informs enigmatically that the whole process of the vision under the stage of ecstasy took “three days and three nights” (ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ νύκτας) (Leg 2:2), which may have a symbolic background.²⁶³

This study considers elements of this stage of the ritual to be located outside the visionary. These elements, with their profound implications, play a significant role in shaping the religious experience of the assembly members. The study examines the meaning of these elements, their impact on the development of the prophetic assembly, and their influence on the mood and consciousness of the practitioners. The elements that trigger processes in the visionary leading to a subjective experience of encountering the divine are initially identified in the text, placed in context, and subsequently scrutinised using the tools of the interdisciplinary method.

²⁶³ For a symbolic meaning of the revelation time to Enoch in 2 Enoch, see Basil Lourié, “Calendrical Elements in 2 Enoch,” in *New Perspective on 2 Enoch. No Longer Slavonic Only*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov, Gabriele Boccaccini (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 191–219, here 191–220.

3.2.1 Hearing the Door Open

The “door/gate opened” image informs readers of the beginning of another stage of the ritual, which consists of the ascent and revelation. In ancient literary traditions, the door/gate opening motif is identified with the opening gates of heaven.²⁶⁴ In Jewish apocalyptic traditions, the same motif is connected to the ascension to heaven,²⁶⁵ while Hekhalot texts perceive it as the image of “Palaces” or “Temples of Salvation” dwelt by angels (κύριοι).²⁶⁶ Observe in the ‘E’ version the repeated mention of the “door/gate opened” (‘ḥḥṭ’ – *hohəṭə*) (6:6.9), which is confirmed in ‘C’^{akh} by the Coptic πο “the door of greatness” (6:9). The ‘S’ and ‘L’ versions have “strength of words (снлоу салвесѣ – *silu slōvesŭ* / uirtutem uerborum)” instead:

6:6

‘E’: When he spoke with Hezekiah words of truth and faith they all heard (ወስጦዑ ከሎሙ – *wasamə ‘u k’əllomu*) the door (ሉኅጥጥ – *lahohəṭə*) which he opened, and the voice of the Spirit (ወለቃለ መገፈሰ – *walaqala manəfasa*).

‘S’: And when he spoke the words of truth the Holy Spirit came upon him (Дохъ свѣтъи наиде на нь – *Duchŭ svetyi naide na nŭ*) and they all saw and heard (вѣси видѣша и слышаху – *vŭsi viděša i slyšachu*) the voice of the Holy Spirit (вѣщаниа свѣтаго Доуха – *věštanija svętago Ducha*).

‘L’²: He then spoke the words of truth. The Holy Spirit came upon him, (Spiritus sanctus superuenit in eum), and all saw and heard (omnes uidebant, et audiebant) the words of the Holy Spirit

²⁶⁴ Alexandre Moret, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte d’après les papyrus de Berlin et les textes du temple de Sethi I à Abydos*. Annales du Musée Guimet. Bibliothèque d’Études, vol. XIV (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1902), 49–50.

²⁶⁵ Test. Levi 5:1 (Aramaic Test. Levi 4Q213a 1.11.14-18); 3 Bar 2:2.5; 3:1; 4:2; 11:2).

²⁶⁶ HekhR § 247; HekhZ § 420; 3 En 1:2). For the theory on the door/gate motif as the image of “Palaces” or “Temples of Salvation” depicted in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (Apoc. Zeph. preserved in Clement’s *Stromateis* [5.11.77.2]), see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 19.

3.2.2 Hearing the Voice of the Spirit

The author connects the phenomenon of the “voice of the Spirit heard by all” with the “door being opened” (6:6) and “worshipping by all on their knees” (6:8). The figure of the “Holy Spirit” is connected with the visionary who “speaks in the Holy Spirit” (6:10a) and is perceived by the seer as a “magnificent angel” from “the seventh heaven” (6:13; 7:2). Observe the references to: (1) the phenomenon of the voice of the Spirit heard by all while worshipping (6:8):

6:8a

‘E’: And it came to happen that, when all heard (ሰምዑ ስለሙ – *samə’u k^wallomu*) the voice of the Holy Spirit (ለቃለ መንፈስ ቅዱስ – *laqāla manāfāsa qədusə*), ^{8b} they all worshipped on their knees and sang hymns to the God of truth who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints.

‘C^{akh}’: Hearing the voice] of the Holy Spirit (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος – *apkhrao]u mp’pna otouab]ə*) ^{8b} [... they raised h]ymns to the God of truth [...], he who is holy forever.

‘S’: And when they heard (οὐκ ἤκουσαν – *uslyšaša*) the voice of the Holy Spirit (ἡ γλῶσσα τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος – *glas svętago dukha*) they bowed their knees and praised the highest God who rests in the saints.

‘L²’: Then when they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit (uocem sancti Spiritus), they knelt down and sang to the highest God who rests in the saints.

(2) the occurrence of “speaking in the Holy Spirit” by Isaiah while (6:10):

6:10

‘E’: While he was speaking in the Holy Spirit (ይገናኝ በመንፈስ ቅዱስ – *yətanāggar bamanāfas qəddus*), while all were listening, he fell silent, his mind was

‘C^{akh}’: And in the hour [... ὥρα] while they were all listening, they became [...] of this aeon he took from his mind [...] the men who stood before him.

‘S’: While he was speaking in the Holy Spirit (Γλαβολιούστιν ἡμεῖς ἐκείνῳ ἐκείνῳ – *Glagoliuštīu zhe iemu svętyimī dukhūmī*) to be heard by all, he suddenly fell silent,

‘L²’: While he was indeed speaking in the Holy Spirit (Loquente uero eo in Spiritu sancto) and everyone was hearing him, he immediately fell silent. And from

taken up from him,
and he himself could
not see the men who
were standing in front
of him.

and no longer saw
those who stood
before him.

that moment they
saw someone
standing in front
of him.

(3) the figure of the “Holy Spirit” perceived by the visionary as a “magnificent angel” from “the seventh heaven” (6:13; 7:2).

6:13

‘E’: And the angel that was sent to him to show him (the vision) (ወመልእክ ዘተፈነወ ከመ ያርእዮ – *wamala’akə zatafanawa kama yārə’əyo*) was not of this firmament, nor was he of the angels of the glory of this world but from the seventh heaven (he) had come (ዓለም አለ እምሳብዕ ስምይ መጽአ – *‘ālamə ‘alā ‘əməsābə ‘ə saməyə maṣə’a*).

7:2

‘E’: When I prophesied according to the announcement (ስምዕ ዘስማዕከሙ – *samə’a za-semā’akemmu*) you heard, I saw a magnificent angel (መልእክ ከቡረ – *malə’aka kəbur*); And it was not like the glory of the angels that I always saw, but (I saw) in him great glory and dignity (such) that I cannot describe the glory of this angel.

‘S’: When I prophesied according to the message (፪ኚ ርሎሃኧ – *vū slukha*) you heard (ገጽ ርሎሃከ – *že slyšaste*), I saw an angel of glory (ልዝራል ርሎሃከ – *angela slavina*), not like the glory of the angels that I had always seen, but (he) had a great and holy glory which I cannot narrate.

‘L²’: When I prophesied the heard words, which you heard, I saw a glorious angel (angelum gloriosum), not of the glory of those angels that I had always seen, but having a certain great glory and light, which I cannot account for.

‘L¹’: According to what you heard through the prophecy, I saw the glorious angel (angelum gloriosum), not like the angels with glory whom I had always seen, but having a great and holy glory which I cannot explain.

It is crucial to note that the voice of the Spirit (ወለቃለ መንፈስ – *walaqala manəfasa*) heard by all (6:6; 6:8) and Isaiah’s speech in the Holy Spirit (ይጉናገር በመንፈስ ቅዱስ – *yəṭənāggar bamanəfas qəddus*) also heard by all (6:10) are not mere coincidences, but significant contributors to the development of the ceremony. The utterances linked to the Holy Spirit are also in relation to the doors to heaven open (6:6), prompt all the members of the ceremony to worshipping on their knees (6:8),

and enable the sage to achieve another phase of the ritual (6:10). These occurrences, which seem to denote the activity of prophesying, are underscored by the sentence, “I prophesied according to the announcement” (ሰምዕ ዘሰማዕከሙ – *saməʿa za-semāʾakemmu*) (7:2), which also alludes to the ability to utter words by linking them directly to the authority of the Holy Spirit, seems to consist of transmitting the message announced and heard. This idea is further reinforced by the use of the radical of the verb ሰምዕ (*samʿa* – to hear), which is used twice in 7:2, first to express the action of prophesying, “I prophesied,” and then in “the announcement” heard. As such, the verb ሰምዕ (*samʿa* – to hear) transmits the concept of a message announced and heard. Similarly, in the ‘S’ version, the verb слышати (*slušati* – to hear) is used to transmit how Isaiah prophesied according to the message heard by all (7:2), to hear the voice of the Spirit (6:6; 6:8), and listen to Isaiah while he was speaking in the Holy Spirit (6:10). Because the verbs ሰምዕ (*samʿa* – to hear) and слышати (*slušati* – to hear) are used in the “voice of the Spirit heard by all” (6:6; 6:8), in “Isaiah’s speech in Holy Spirit” (6:10), and in “I prophesied according to the announcement” (7:2), Norelli argues that these occurrences convey the same phenomenon, specifically Isaiah’s act of prophesying according to the message heard.²⁶⁷

The understanding of the term ἀκοή in relation to an announcement or preaching about faith is not new, as noted by scholars in Greek, early Jewish and Christian traditions.²⁶⁸ The novelty lies in the application of this meaning, which draws on the verbs used in the Ethiopic and Slavonic translations of Ascls 6 and 7:2 for the

²⁶⁷ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 368–369.

²⁶⁸ Gerhard Kittel, “ἀκοή”, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. Vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932), 222–223, cf. particularly the commentary about Gal 2:3 and Isa 53:1.

occurrences in 6:6 and 6:8. This unique approach, yet to be explored by scholars, opens up new avenues of understanding. By examining Norelli's idea, this study identifies, in 6:6, 6:8, and 6:10, a set of reiterative recitations of Isaiah's prophecy that convey the message of faith as perceived by the practitioners of the ritual.

The idea of a prophecy uttered according to the message heard and reiterated during the ritual, echoes Rappaport's central idea in his ritual treatment. He introduces the concept of Ultimate Sacred Postulates, the bedrock and unassailable elements of religion, such as *Shema* or *Credo*. Through the very act of ritual practices, with their inherent performativeness, these postulates are solidified as sacred and unchanging. This performative expression and ritual recitation serve as the cornerstone for establishing God's existence as a social fact.²⁶⁹

The prophesying of Isaiah, in 6:6, delivers a message about faith in the existence of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, in 6:8. This pivotal element of the belief, central to the practitioners of the ritual in Ascls 6, is initially embraced through the solemn gesture of laying on of hands in the preparatory phase (6:5). It is then performatively recited throughout the ritual in Isaiah's act of prophesying (6:6; 6:8; 6:10). This ritualistic repetition solidifies the sacred postulate about the Holy Spirit, rendering it unquestionable and unfalsifiable, and firmly establishes it among the members of the prophetic assembly.

The Ultimate Sacred Postulates are not only established in rituals; each practitioner can experience them through their body in songs and hymns, which are intensified by rhythmicity and repetition. These experiences are founded on the self-

²⁶⁹ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Cultural Anthropology 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 277–281.

unification of somatic and mental processes that generate both cognitive computations and experiences of numinous. According to the anthropologist's perspective, an experience of the Ultimate Sacred Postulates is more likely to occur in the performer and leader of the liturgical order. Since the transmitter of the message provides an Ultimate Sacred Postulate with the substances of his breath and body, he is among the principal receivers of the message he is transmitting.²⁷⁰

Isaiah's acts of prophecy, which establish the sacred postulate about the Holy Spirit, are not mere recitations; they are performatively recited and rhythmically repeated (6:6, 6:8, and 6:10). These performances have a profound effect on Isaiah's consciousness, triggering mental processes (6:10), which culminate in an experience of the numinous, as transmitted by the author through "he was seeing a vision" (6:12). While prophesying, Isaiah does not just convey the Ultimate Sacred Postulate; he embodies it through the performance of his own body. This personal connection between Isaiah and the Postulate is palpable, as the members of the ceremony do not just hear the voice of the Holy Spirit (6:6, 6:8, and 6:10); they witness it in action through Isaiah. The visionary admits to having seen the Holy Spirit as an angel (7:2), and the author of the narrative explains the Holy Spirit was sent to Isaiah to show him the vision (6:13).

3.2.3 Worshipping on Earth and in Heaven

The prophetic ritual, a powerful conduit for the members of the ceremony to encounter the divine, is marked by a stage of collective unity and harmony. This is

²⁷⁰ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Cultural Anthropology 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 228; 284; 388.

exemplified in the act of “worshipping” and “singing hymns” in “one voice.” The stage of singing hymns and praises, which commences in 6:8–9, resonates throughout the visionary account until 11:36, underscoring the collective power of this ritual.

The worship phase of the ritual is rooted in the significant hymn dedicated to the “God of truth” in 6:8b, inspired by LXX Isa 57:15a. This hymn resonates strongly with 10:6, where the angel clarifies to the visionary the identity of the consignee of the praise hymns from the six heavens, and also in 7:15–17, where the angelic praise is sung “in one voice.”

6:8

‘E’: And it came to happen that, when all heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, ^{8b} they all (ἅπαντες – *kʷallomu*) worshipped (ἀγαλλῶ – *sagadu*) on their knees (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ – *babərakihomu*) and sang hymns (ὠδοῦσιν – *wasabəḥəwo*) to the God of truth who is holy forever (ἅγιος – *laʼaməlāka šədaqə*), the Highest in the uppermost world (ἄνω – *lalaʼulə laza wəsəta ləʼulə ʼalamə*), and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints (ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις – *bakədusānə yāʼarəfə*).

‘C^{akh}’: Hearing the voice] of the Holy Spirit ^{8b} [... they raised h]ymns (ἀγῶνισαν – *aurhu]mni*) to the God of truth [...] (ἀπνοῦτε ἡμῖν – *apnoutə ntmia*), he who is holy forever (ἁγιος – *pətouaaba ša anēhə*).

‘S’: And when they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit they bowed their knees (προκλониша – *prēkloniša kolēne*) and praised (ἐκπαινεσάντων – *vūspěša*) the highest God (Ἐξοῦ – *Bogu vyšinemu*) who rests in the saints (ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις – *počivajuštomu vū svetyikhū*).

‘L²’: Then when they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, they knelt down (flexerunt genua) and sang to the highest God (cantauerunt Deo altissimo) who rests in the saints (requiescenti in sanctis).

Note different groups and entities engaged in the worshipping: all the members of the assembly (6:8–9); all the angels (7:15–17); all the Righteous and Isaiah in the

seventh heaven (9:28); all who remained standing before Isaiah (11:36). Note the occurrence of the verbs referring to the act of worshipping in the following passages of the visionary account: 6:8–9, 7:15, 9:28, 11:36. Observe that the verb ḥḥ (sabbəḥa) is used to convey the practice of singing hymns: (1) by the prophets at the beginning of the worshipping phase of the ritual, (2) by the angels in the heavens, (3) by Isaiah through the vision, (4) by the righteous in the seventh heaven, and (5) praises by the prophets after the vision has been reported. Such a wide use of ḥḥ (sabbəḥa) indicates that the author understands the praise undertaken by worshippers on earth and heavens as a singular liturgical event.

The act of worship in the ritual is further confirmed by Coptic traditions, particularly through the verb τᾱλο εἰραῖ (talo əhrai). This verb, along with the noun ἑῡμν (humn), signifies the praise of the prophets at the beginning of the worship stage, the praise of the angels in the fourth heaven, and the praise of the righteous, complemented by the additional verb οὔωστ (ouōšt). The use of τᾱλο εἰραῖ is replaced by οὔωστ to specifically convey the praise of the prophets following the vision. Lastly, the ‘L¹’ version enhances the imagery of angels singing hymns. The ‘L²’ and ‘S’ versions describe the phase through the verbs *cantare* and *glorificare*, and ⲃⲱⲥⲡⲉⲧⲏ (vǝspěti), respectively.

6:9

‘E’: And they sang hymns (ⲱⲱⲱⲏⲉ ḥḥ) – wawahabu sabbəḥātā to him who had granted such a door in the foreign world, that he had granted it to a human being.

‘C^{akh}’: [...has] given the door of greatness (ṗḥa]pize m̄piro ṇ ṗḥeṇ[c – rkha]rizə m̄piro n tiaəiē[s] [...]) to human being.

‘S’: and such strength in the world (ⲥⲏⲗⲱⲱ ⲥⲏⲗⲱⲃⲉⲥⲧ – silu slōvesŭ) gives to words.

‘L²’: and that gives such a great strength of words (uirtutem uerborum) in the world.

7:15–17

‘E’: ¹⁵ (...) and they (angels) all glorified with one voice (ወይሴቤላ ከሉሙ በአሐዱ ቃል – *wayəsebəḥə kʷelomu ba’ahadu qālə*). The throne was in the middle, and it was he who glorified (...). ¹⁶ And I asked the angel who was guiding me, and I said to him, “To whom is this praise directed?” ¹⁷ And he said to me: “In the glory of the seventh heaven, to the One who rests in the holy world (ለዘ በቅዱስ ያዐርፍ ዓለም – *laza bakədusə yā’arəfə ‘alamə*) and to his Beloved (...).”

‘S’: ¹⁵ Those on the right had different glory and they sang in a single voice (ποταχουῦ ἑδνιῆμῶ γλαςῶμῶ – *pojahu jedniēmŭ glasŭmŭ*), while those on the left sang after them (...).

‘L²’: ¹⁵ Those who were on the right had another glory, and they sang with one voice, and those who were on the left behind them with them.

‘L¹’: ¹⁵ And the angels on the right were not such as the ones on the left, as the ones on the right had a great brightness, and they sang in one voice (*et laudabant onmes una uoce*), and the seat was in the middle (...).

9:28

‘E’: And when all the Righteous that I had seen and the angels saw him, they came to him; and Adam, Abel, Seth and all the Righteous first came near, and they worshipped Him and praised Him all in one voice (ወሰብሐታ ከሉሙ በአሐዱ ቃል – *wasabəḥəqā kʷelomu ba’ahadu qālə*), and for my part, I also praised with them, and my praise was like theirs (ስብሐትየ ከሙ ዘአሆሙ – *səbəḥātəya kama zi’ahomu*).

‘C^{akh}’: they went [. . .] Adam and Abel and S[et] and the righ[teous . . .] to him at first, they worshiped and [lifted up h]ymns (ወወጥፕ ልዐህ ጀ[ጸብፆጽሂ]ሙን – *ōšt aou h[aəirhu]mni*) with them and their glory became [in the way] of him.

‘S’: And all the righteous that I had seen walked towards him and worshiped him singing with one voice (поклониша сѧ ѧмоу појуше ѧдннѧмѧ гласомѧ – *pokloniša sę jemu pojušte jedniēmŭ glasomŭ*), and he was like them, and their glory was like that of others.

‘L²’: And all the righteous came up to him, and they worshiped him singing in unison (*adoraurerunt eum una uoce cantantes*), and his voice was like that of them.

Leg 2:27–28

And I saw there all the Righteous starting with Adam: Abel the righteous and Seth the righteous, Jared the righteous and Enoch the righteous, and all the descendants of those righteous. And I saw how they worshiped (ὡς προσεκύνουν), and I also fell down with them (ἔπεσον καὶ γὰρ μετ’ αὐτῶν) and worshiped (προσεκύνησα); and stood up.

11:36

‘E’: ³⁶These things I saw. And Isaiah said to all who remained standing before him and sang hymns (ለኩሉም እለ ይቀውሙ ቅድሚታ ወይሉብሉ – *ləkʷelomu ʾəla yəqawəmu qədəməhu wayələbəhu*).

‘C^{sah}’: ³⁶These things indeed] I saw. [And these wonderful things Is]aiah said [to those who stood and] listened, [and praised (ἀγχοῦ – *ausmou*).

‘S’: ³⁶This I saw, “Isaiah said to those who stood around him and who, hearing these wonderful things, celebrated and sang (прославиша и въспѣша – *proslaviša i vŭspěša*) to God that such grace gives to human beings.

‘L²’: ³⁶These things, while he saw them, Isaiah said them to those who were around him, and when they heard these wonderful things they all sang and glorified

The first passage, 6:8–9, marks a significant transition in the prophetic ceremony. The initial acts of listening to the dialogue of the mystical prayer, laying on of hands, and exchanging of prophecies give way to a more intense form of worship. The act of worship on one’s knees (ወሰብክዎ – *wasabəḥəwo*) towards the divine being is not merely an individual act of prayer but rather a process that unites the prophets. The prophetic journey undergoes a transformative experience and evolves into a fervent collective by “them all” (ኩሉም – *kwəllomu*). The praise is directed to “the God of truth, who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints” (6:8).

As the prophets take the lead in a hymn to “the Highest in the high world” (6:8), the heavenly beings respond with a resounding song “to Him who rests in the holy world” (7:15–17), as illustrated in our second passage quoted above. The setting of

Ascls 7 depicts a dialogue between Isaiah and the angel, set against the backdrop of the impending ascension (3–8) and the actual ascent (9). This is followed by a journey through the first two of the three great wings of the celestial world: the firmament and the five lower heavens. In the firmament (9–12), Isaiah observes the disputes among Satan’s angels, a reflection of the earthly struggles. In the first heaven (13–17), Isaiah witnesses the majestic praise intoned by the choirs of angels and is informed that their worship is directed to “the One who rests in the holy world (ለዘ በቅዱስ ያዐርፍ ዓለም – *laza bakədusə yā ‘arəfə ‘alamə*) and to his Beloved (...)” (17). The angel then clarifies the identity of the consignee of the praise and hymns of the six heavens, which is “the One who is the Highest of the high ones” (10:6).

The third passage of our interest, 9:28, reveals a profound truth – the harmonious worship of the heavenly and human beings. The setting is the seventh heaven, a realm where the Righteous, the pre-existing Christ, and the Holy Spirit are present. The author paints a picture of a heavenly liturgy involving the Righteous worshipping the Lord: “They worshipped Him and praised Him all in one voice” (ወሰብሕቃ ኩሎሙ በአሐዱ ቃል – *wasabəḥəqā kʷelomu ba ‘aḥadu qālə*). In a moment of profound significance, the seer is not merely an observer but a participant in this divine worship. After glimpsing the heavenly books and the garments set aside for Christians (9:19–26), he is granted a vision of the Lord himself (9:27). He is invited to participate in the heavenly worship: “I also praised with them, and my praise was like theirs” (ነብሐትየ ከሙ ዚአሆሙ – *səbəḥātəya kama zi ‘ahomu*).

This cycle of praise continues until after Isaiah reports the revelation to “all who remain standing before him, and they sing hymns” (ለኩሎሙ እለ ይቀውሙ ቅድሜሁ ወይሉብሑ – *ləkʷelomu ‘əla yəqawəmu qədəməhu wayəlebəhu*) (11:36).

Our initial analysis of the passages above leads us to a crucial intersection. The depiction of diverse groups and entities harmoniously praising the divinity not only raises questions about the origins of these narratives but also aligns with the hypothesis that these passages reflect the actual performances of the prophetic guild, as embodied by the characters of the prophets in *Ascls Part One*.

The idea of actual liturgical performances is supported by revealing the liturgical material used in worship. Three passages, 6:8–9, 7:15–17, and 10:6, feature fragments of hymns, with their liturgical use evidenced in early Christian texts, as noted by Knibb. Furthermore, as discussed earlier in Chapter Two (cf. § 2.3), Norelli argues that the use of LXX Isa 57:15a in early Christian liturgy may have rendered it suitable for the praise of God in *Ascls* 6:8 and 7:17. In these passages, hymnic formulations that evoke divinity, like “the God of truth who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints” (6:8), and “This is the one who is Highest of the high ones, who dwells in the holy world and rests among the saints” (10:6), prompt us to examine their significance in the ceremony. Identifying shared elements in the *havurah* account and *Ascls Part One*, both visionary accounts, certainly sparks our interest in the potential practice of concomitant worship, a concept rooted in the *Merkavah* material. Our attention is particularly directed towards this potential practice of concomitant worship based on *Merkavah* material. This exploration raises questions regarding the accessibility of understanding of *Merkavah* lore for Jews in liturgical rituals. It also intersects with an inquiry into potential liturgical patterns based on *Merkavah* mysticism employed by the prophetic group of the Ascension of Isaiah to design their worship.

Ithamar Gruenwald's claim that Merkavah materials were primarily integrated into the synagogue's liturgy, which developed in post-Talmudic times, sheds light on the profound connection between Merkavah mysticism and liturgical practices. His argument rests on the belief that the liturgical poets composed the three forms of Kedushah's mystical elements.²⁷¹ The liturgy posits that the recitation of the Kedushah, which aligns with the three daily prayers of the People of Israel in their pursuit of God's descent to His throne in the seventh heaven (Hekhalot Rabbati § 163), forms a harmonious interplay with special hymns and activities of angelic beings.²⁷² Rachel Ellior perceives in Hekhalot literature a mystical prayer, a shared prayer, and a heavenly prayer as interconnected modes of worship that embody the visionary abstraction of the Temple service. She posits that the Kedushah was a communal prayer undertaken by the congregation of angels on high and the human beings worshipping God on earth.²⁷³ The visionary's specific role here is to enlighten the community about those events that occur in the upper world only when the Jewish community participates in communal prayer in the lower world. As such, the concomitant actions of Merkavah mystics facilitate access to the heavens for those who ascend to the upper world and for those who remain below; and the Kedushah prayer, orchestrated by the visionaries, plays a pivotal role in accessing the heavens. This concept resonates with Scholem's depiction of the atmosphere of mystical reality in Hekhalot literature, characterised not by love or tenderness but by attributes of sublimity, power as majesty, fear, and trembling. This atmosphere is conveyed through prayers and hymns, such as the

²⁷¹ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 166.

²⁷² Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 188.

²⁷³ Rachel Ellior, "From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions," *JSQ* 4, no. 3 (1997): 217–267, here 230–235.

Kedushah, with the rhythm and recurrence of keywords of the supernatural recited to induce a state of ecstasy and accompany the seer on his journey through the heavens.²⁷⁴

In essence, Merkavah mystics held a dual role. They served as conductors of the harmonious interplay of hymns, particularly in the form of the Kedushah prayer, between the congregation of angelic beings in the heavenly realm and human beings in the earthly realm. Simultaneously, they acted as observers of events unfolding in the upper world, facilitating the ascension of some individuals to that realm while the community was immersed in communal prayer. This ceremony was characterised by an atmosphere of sublimity and fear, as described by Scholem.

As we noted earlier, the passages 6:8–9, 7:15–17, and 10:6 include sections of a hymn that were used in early Christian liturgy. The portion of the so-called Clementine Liturgy, which includes parallels to Ascl's Part One, is the subject of scholarly debate regarding the mutual influence between early Christian liturgy and the Jewish literature and liturgical traditions of Kedushah liturgy.²⁷⁵ This observation underscores the

²⁷⁴ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 40–79. For a description of the mystical reality in Hekhalot literature, see Alexander Altmann, "Shirei Kedushah be-Sifrut ha-Hekhalot ha-Kedu-mah," ed. Edward Robertson and Meir Wallenstein, *Melilah*, Vol. 2 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1946), 1–24; Alexander Altmann, *Panim shel Yahadut – Faces of Judaism: Selected Essays*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1983), 44–67; Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabati," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 149–156; Saul Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim," in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, ed. Gershom Scholem, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 118–126; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 98–126; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 11–37, 359–447; Joseph Dan, "The Religious Experience of the Merkavah," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, Vol. 13, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 289–307; Rachel Elijor, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature," *JSQ* 1, no. 1 (1993): 3–53; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. Robert A. Herrera (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1993), 13–44.

²⁷⁵ W. C. Unnik, "1 Clement 34 and the 'Sanctus'," *VC* 5, no. 1 (1951): 204–248; W. C. Unnik, "Studies on the so-called First Epistle of Clement," in *Encounters with Hellenism. Studies on the First Letter of Clement*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Laurence L. Welborn (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 115–180; Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Holy, Holy, Holy: The Story of a Liturgical Formula*. Julius-Wellhausen-Vorlesung, Heft 1 (Berlin / New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2008), 15–36; Bryan D. Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer*

intricate interplay of religious liturgical practices, which influenced both the prophetic guild and the author of Ascls Part One.

Isaiah, although not the conductor of the liturgical events and interconnected hymns and prayers, is depicted by the author as a visionary deeply immersed in the continuation of the worship initiated by the prophets (6:8–9) and heard from the hosts of angels in the six lower heavens (7:15–17; 10:1–6). The praise intoned by the human worshippers to “the Highest in the uppermost world” is seamlessly continued by the heavenly beings in the heavens as “the One who rests in the holy world”. This continuity of the worship, initiated on earth and followed in heaven, is a key theme also perceived by Norelli in Kedushah hymns in Hekhalot Rabatti. The earthly-celestial liturgical event is characterised by the dependence on beginning the angelic liturgy only after the human chants have commenced, in the “Daily Worship in Heaven and on Earth” (HekhR § 173–175).²⁷⁶

The liturgical ceremony described in Ascls Part One is steeped in a profound sense of sublimity, reminiscent of the mystical reality found in Hekhalot literature. The act of singing hymns and praises provides the backdrop for the visionary ritual. The hymn chanted to “the God of truth who is holy forever, the Highest in the uppermost world, and who dwells holy on high, and who rests among the saints” (6:8) is already announced from the initial stage of the ceremony. This is intensified by the collective worship and singing of hymns in “one voice” (9:28), occurring simultaneously on earth

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25–45; Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Die altkirchlichen Belege für die synagogale Form des Sanctus (Kedusha/Jes. 6,3; Ez. 3,12),” in *Meilenstein: Festgabe für Herbert Donner zum 16. Februar 1995*, ed. Manfred Weippert and S. Timm, Ägypten und Altes Testament 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 172–187; Williamson, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, 16–17.

²⁷⁶ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 338–340.

and in heaven. This collective act of worship continues after the revelation is shared by the visionary to “all those who are standing before him” (11:36).

In light of the above analysis, it is noteworthy that the liturgical patterns, influenced by the Merkavah lore and an interplay of religious liturgical practices, and empowered by early Christian liturgical material, shaped the author’s depiction in *Ascls Part One*. The prophetic assembly is portrayed as an earthly-heavenly community united in praising the same consignee. This unity, propelled by the prophets’ determination, commences with their worship on their knees, is amplified by the joining of heavenly beings, and culminates with the prophets surrounding the visionary.

The central theme of our analysis in this subsection is the concept of concomitant worship of human and heavenly beings in a cult across both earthly and heavenly planes. This concept, as perceived in passages 6:8–9 and 7:15–17, is further reinforced in 9:28. In the setting of the seventh heaven, Isaiah joins the Righteous in worshipping the Lord “in one voice” (*ba’ahadu qālā*), and in first voice speech admits: “my praise is like theirs” (ሰብሐትኅ ከሙ ዚኣሆሙ – *səbəḥātəya kama zi’ahomu*).

The 2 Enoch tradition serves as the backdrop for Isaiah’s worship with the Righteous in the seventh heaven. Enoch, introduced as a righteous scribe, plays a crucial role in this book. He intercedes for the Watchers, the fallen angels, in a failed attempt, which also grants him the opportunity to tour the chambers of the heavenly temple. Enoch is then taken to heaven and brought into the presence of God, where he stands like a heavenly priest despite not being transformed upon ascending to the heavenly temple. The climax of this writing is Enoch’s encounter with the divine. The

image of the angels from 2 Enoch “having but one voice and singing unison” (и з крилаты едины гла сщце, и по[ж]ще единоглаголю) (19:6) recalls the earthly-celestial ceremony from the Ascension of Isaiah.²⁷⁷ The context of this passage is Enoch’s vision in the sixth heaven, where he encounters seven good angels, supervised by archangels, who are engaged harmoniously in liturgical activities.

While Enoch observes only the celestial liturgy of the seven angels, Isaiah commits himself to worshipping in unison with the heavenly beings. Despite this difference, the parallel in 2 Enoch contributes to a deeper understanding of how the author of Ascls Part One was not only influenced by literary strands of thought but was also inspired by apocalyptic traditions, which are known to convey visionary religious experiences.

In the pursuit of unravelling the possible influences that shaped the concept of a community on both earthly and heavenly planes in Ascls Part One, the collective liturgical practices observed in the Qumran discoveries, particularly the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, come to the forefront, as discussed earlier in Chapter Two (cf. § 2.2). The passages evoking the concept of community worship, particularly the sentence, “they (angels) all glorified with one voice” (7:15), which creates an aura of communal mysticism, can be highlighted as indicative of the similarities between the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and the Ascension of Isaiah. This resemblance suggests a similar liturgical idea and the practice of sharing known religious formulae between heterogeneous literatures, which may have been performed to engender religious

²⁷⁷ Andrei A. Orlov, *Divine Mysteries in the Enochic Tradition* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2023), 39–45.

experience and interpreted in new ways to produce emerging early Jewish and Christian compositions.

The depiction of the worship undertaken by the prophetic guild in Ascls Part One, as embodied by the characters and entities in passages 6:8–9, 7:15–17 and 9:28, offers fascinating insights into the dynamic between earthly-heavenly worshippers. To understand how these passages reflect the actual performances of the prophetic guild, we turn to the invaluable insights of Rappaport’s ritual studies. A fundamental concept in Rappaport’s studies is *communitas*, a term coined by anthropologist Victor Turner to describe a group united by a shared experience of unprecedented potency and liminality when performed in an intense feeling of social togetherness and belonging of a ritual.²⁷⁸ Viewing the ritual through this lens, the anthropologist discerns a profound impact on the minds and bodies of individuals who partake in these harmonious practices of congregational rituals, often leading to the disclosure of the divine. This integration of members and revelation of the divine is not merely an act but a profound experience. Those who immerse themselves in the intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging within *communitas* during the liturgical rituals of cultic events do so partly due to the group influence congregated in harmonious practices. The coordination of ritual practices is not simply a series of actions, but a transformative journey that often has profound cognitive, affective, and social consequences. It produces a state of mind, as well as society. According to Rappaport’s idea of concomitancy in rituals, it holds profound implications. It not only leads to comprehensive self-unification through participation in ritual but also has the potential

²⁷⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 128. For modalities of and processes in *communitas*, see esp. 131–165.

to bring the acts and sensations of the body into the mind's computations, implying a fusion of somatic and mental processes. The harmony in rituals can lead practitioners to a profound sense of unity with the cosmos.²⁷⁹

While the ritually induced state of mind of the prophetic guild in Ascls Part One may appear to commence with the initial steps of the ritual, it is the collective act of worshipping (6:8–9), the singing of hymns on bended knees, and the rhythmic, repetitive utterance of divine names over a significant period that triggers biological and neurological effects in the participants. As an integral component of the Jewish ritual, the prophets' kneeling in this passage represents a posture of subordination to a higher order, "the Highest in the uppermost world." This act of subordination, a subsequent step after hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, is not merely a statement but a physical gesture that profoundly impacts both body and mind. Because this act is performed by "all" in the group, its effects should extend beyond the individual to the collective. These ritual actions or gestures, which either encourage alterations of consciousness or reveal the loss of discursive logic, indicate that the group of prophets in Ascls 6 forms a society, *communitas*, where the distinction of discursive logic is overridden. Participating in the collective act of singing hymns, moving in unison with others, kneeling together, and repetitively reciting the divine names serves not only as a symbol of the union among the prophets; it is an acceptance of a larger order. This acceptance is exemplified in 6:8–9, where the prophets experience their unity in

²⁷⁹ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 380–388. For a typology of religious rituals and an approach to their various phases through the lenses of psychology, see Robert N. McCauley, E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind. Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

worship, as they “*commune with each other within this order.*”²⁸⁰ The phrase “they all” signifies unity with oneself, with the guild, and oneness with the cosmos.

Accepting the larger order of oneness enables the prophets to become unified through the coordination of their individual acts observed in kneeling, singing, reciting, and worshipping. This coordination has cognitive and affective consequences, which the author points out in changes in the visionary’s body and behaviour (6:10–12), and is perceptible in the seer’s dialogue with the angel throughout the visionary account. As Isaiah (1) loses himself in prophesying, “he was speaking in the Holy Spirit” (6:10), pronounced rhythmically and repetitively; as (2) he becomes absorbed in the unified community, “they all heard the door opened” (6:6); “they all worshipped (...) and sang hymns” (6:8); “they all were listening” (6:10); (3) he experiences the feeling of oneness with the cosmos, “when I prophesied (...) I saw a magnificent angel” (7:2); (4) he reaches a state of elation in which he feels himself filled with an energy beyond his ordinary state when the angel requests to join in worshipping and singing hymns to the Lord, “I also was singing praises with them, and my praise was like theirs” (9:28).

The prophets’ acceptance of the larger order of oneness and the unified state, perceived through the coordination of their individual acts, also has social consequences, producing a state of society. The society created in Ascls Part One is earthly-heavenly *communitas*, where the unity between humanity and the divine is experienced through coordinated worship on both earthly and heavenly planes. The larger order, accepted by the prophets, is experienced by the visionary when he is received in the lower heavens and contemplates the heavenly beings worshipping the

²⁸⁰ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 220.

same consignee (7:15-17). They sing the same hymns the prophets intonate on the earth, praising “in one voice.” The coordinated worship in the seventh heaven of the earthly-heavenly *communitas* is depicted by the image of the Righteous and the visionary praising together and “in one voice” (9:28). Isaiah, entirely submerged in an ecstatic state, finds himself in harmony with the prophets, at the beginning of the worship phase, united with the heavenly beings praising in the heavens, and in accord with all the fellow members at the final worship, who “sang hymns” after he recounted the vision to them (11:36).

Passages 6:8–9, 7:15–17, and 9:28, when viewed from an anthropological perspective, reveal encounters with the divine that formed part of a communitarian worship ritual practised by early Christian communities. These numinous experiences were rooted in a profound acceptance of unity with oneself, the community, and the cosmos. This acceptance of oneness led to coordinated acts of worship, triggering biological and cognitive processes in the bodies of the prophets. Such processes induced altered states of consciousness and elation, facilitating the disclosure of the divine.

The analysis of the parallels between these excerpts and the early Christian and Jewish literary traditions reveals the author’s creative use of Merkavah mysticism, early Christian liturgical hymns and formulae, and Enochic apocalyptic traditions to compose the account of earthly-heavenly worship. However, none of these traditions reveals as profound and strong a role of communitarian worship in encountering the divine as Ascls Part One.

Conclusion

This Chapter explores the external factors that contribute to the visionary experience, as provided by the visionary's religious society. These factors are seen as elements that enrich and shape this experience. The experience unfolds within a deeply communal context, where prophets come together to partake in their prophetic ceremony, each contributing to the collective experience. In light of the theory of *habitus* and considering the meaning of ritualised actions, passages 6:3-5 and 6:7 reveal a "state of body" that is cultivated in the prophets. They undergo a process of learning and transformation, both in mind and body, in preparation for the upcoming events, fostering a profound sense of unity and harmony among them. The analysis also reveals that the prophets' belief in the divine figure of the Holy Spirit, when uttered and performed in the act of prophesying, plays a crucial role in triggering mental processes. These processes culminate in an experience of the numinous, the divine figure in the form of an angel, as stated by 6:13 and 7:2.

Through the lenses of ritual studies and supported by insight into liturgical traditions, passages 6:8–9, 7:15–17, 9:28 and 11:36 disclose how the prophets' acceptance of *communitas*, enables them to experience, through coordinated worship, their oneness with themselves and the cosmos. This coordinated experience of worshipping triggers cognitive and affective consequences in the body and behaviour of the main prophet, as will be observed in 6:10–12, leading to an altered state of consciousness. The transformed human being, now in a state of elation, continues to experience coordinated actions within the earthly-heavenly *communitas*,

contemplating and worshipping the divine beings in the upper world, as observed in 9:27–42.

The Chapter demonstrates that, through its consecutive phases, the prophetic ritual performed by the devotees, who consider themselves a *communitas*, imparts an experience of the divine. Preparatory practices and rituals, along with the hymns, songs, and prayers provided by visionary traditions, and notably, the setting of the practitioners during the event, all play crucial roles in shaping this profound experience. However, it is the acceptance of every member of the assembly that truly fosters oneness with oneself, with themselves, and with the cosmos. The experiences of this oneness trigger pivotal biological and cognitive processes that lead prophets to encounter the divine.

These conclusions encourage us to continue, in the next Chapter, with the analysis of the internal factors of the visionary account.

Chapter Four: Toward the Religious Experience

Introduction

In light of external factors that have contributed to generations of visionary experiences, questions about the elements of the human body involved in otherworldly journeys intersect with ones about body processes that compelled communities and individuals in the past to experience the divine realm. This Chapter is interested in traces within the text regarding otherworldly experiences that are products of processes occurring in or reflected by the body and behaviour of the visionary. Signs within the text of human body processes related to visionary practices are explored, along with how these processes enable the seer to embark on the otherworldly journey.

The emotional language in the visionary account captivates our attention. The emotions attributed to the visionary through first-person speech play a significant role in understanding the author's perspective on the religious experience presented in the text. This rhetorical device is employed in the visionary account (7:2–11:35) and is particularly evident in the dialogue between the visionary and the angel. A substantial presence of emotions is noted in 7:6.23, 8:22.25, 27–28 and 9:1. The emotional experience attributed to Isaiah, expressed through the first-person speech of this

figure, effectively bridges the gap between long-ago experiences and the readers' present. The author of the original Greek Ascension of Isaiah has engaged with this ascription, implementing the means of emotional impact to reinforce the intimate character of the visionary experience reached by the members of the prophetic group. The writer has also used this resource to engender similar religious experiences among readers, listeners, or performers of the writing.

In light of findings from studies on emotional language found in the visionary reports of early Jewish literature and more broadly in the humanities (cf. §§1.3–4), I argue that the author of *Ascls* Part One, through the deliberate use of literary resources such as body language and emotion words, designs religious experiences to be engendered by the readers and listeners of the composition. The argumentation also draws upon the conclusions reached in Chapter Three, which indicate that behind the prophetic ceremony in *Ascls* Part One, there are signs of genuine religious experiences of the circle of prophets and interpreters. In this context, the purpose of some narratives is to reiterate religious events and experiences. I make the case that certain narratives within the visionary account of Isaiah were employed as an affective script of the visionary experiencing the divine realm to be ritually performed in prophetic assemblies.

A combination of methods from cognitive narratology and embodied cognition, along with patterns employed by scholars of Jewish and Christian literature who examine emotion and body language, is used to explore signs of the encounter with the divine situated within the visionary. Angela Harkins' idea of an affective script, embedded in liturgical texts, prayers, and narratives, and designed for the transformation of readers and listeners, is essential for revealing the role of emotion

and embodied language in *Ascls* Part One. The narrative theory of embodied cognition, developed by Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen, aids in understanding how the narrator in the visionary account of Isaiah acquires the physical presence of readers and listeners and manipulates their bodies. The readers' sense of entering a tangible environment while reading the visionary narrative of Isaiah is illuminated by Anežka Kuzmičová's enactive reading concept. Daniel Merkur's insights into Jewish apocalypses, using the tools of neuropsychology, illuminate the rhetorical function of the dialogues between Isaiah and the angel in *Ascls* Part One. Finally, April D. Connick's application of cognitive science and neuropsychology tools to demonstrate altered states of consciousness produced by traumatic experiences typically articulated in early Christian texts enhances our understanding of a similar mechanism employed by the author of *Ascls* Part One.

This Chapter first demonstrates how affect theory and interdisciplinary studies on emotion benefit biblical scholarship in general and this study in particular by providing practical tools to discern and delimitate the emotional footprint in the apocalypse. In the next phase, I examine sections containing terms used to construct emotional and body language, exploring their meanings and offering initial observations on their dynamics and functions in the text. In the following step, supported by the concept of the affective script, I identify the imaginal body designed by the author to be experienced by readers and listeners. Our reading of the visionary narrative in *Ascls* 8–9 is the central part of the Chapter. Here, the imaginal body and cognitive processes designed by the author are emphasised with the help of tools provided by humanities. I demonstrate how the rhetorical resources embedded in the text have the power to induce the readers and listeners of the narrative to re-

experience the visionary journey of the prophet. Finally, the function of section 6:10–12, known for the visionary’s ascent to heaven described in ecstatic elements, is examined.

4.1. Emotion Language and Its Functions

Emotion has been embraced within the humanities and sciences since the coinage of the term *affect theory* and the distinction of nine allegedly innate affects by Silvan S. Tomkins. He distinguishes distress-anguish, interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, anger-rage, fear-terror, shame-humiliation, disgust, and, related to the latter but subtly distinct from it, the feeling of dismal.²⁸¹ Antonio Damasio addressed the complexity of emotion, drawing partially on new neuroscience technologies in brain imaging and cultural studies, attributing to emotions a central role in social cognition and decision-making.²⁸² Advances in brain physiology inspired exponents of linguistic studies to demonstrate how linguistic analysis tools can be applied to produce descriptions of the meanings of the terms of emotion in different languages.²⁸³

Epistemological studies illuminate the profound role of emotions in decision-making. Emotions, while reinforcing personal beliefs and judgements, play a crucial part in an individual’s practical life. They not only constitute reactions to significant

²⁸¹ Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, 4 vols. Vol. 1: *The Positive Affects*. Vol. 2: *The Negative Affects*. Vol. 3: *The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear*. Vol. 4: *Cognition: Duplication and Transformation of Information* (New York, NY: Springer, 1962–1992).

²⁸² Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003), 147–148; Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1999), 40–42.

²⁸³ Jean Harkins and Anna Wierzbicka, *Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective*. Cognitive Linguistics Research 17 (Berlin / New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001).

objects, events, and states of affairs but also provide valuable insights into their value. Emotions can stimulate evaluative judgement, prompt reassessment or reappraisal of things and events,²⁸⁴ and are therefore indispensable for successful deliberation, critical thinking, and decision-making.²⁸⁵

Studies in ancient literature examine the emotional language employed in narratives and its impact on readers.²⁸⁶ More recently, cognitive narratology has developed theories to explore the connections between the emotions of the narrator, the characters, and the readers influenced by the narrative. This field of study aids in understanding how the emotions portrayed in a narrative, whether by the narrator or the characters, can shape the reader's emotional response, thereby enhancing their engagement with the text.²⁸⁷

The results of interdisciplinary studies on emotion have recently benefited biblical scholarship. Scholars engage in inquiries into passions within biblical literature and deliver studies on the emotional language employed by ancient authors.²⁸⁸ These

²⁸⁴ For the epistemic value of emotion, see Adam Morton, "Epistemic Emotions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 385–400, here 386; Michael S. Brady, *Emotional Insight. The Epistemic Role of Emotional Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Krista R. Muis, Marianne Chevrier, Kelsey M. Losenno, "Epistemic Emotions and Epistemic Cognition Predict Critical Thinking About Socio-Scientific Issues," *Frontiers in Education* 6 (2021): <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.669908/full>

²⁸⁵ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York, NY: G. B. Putnam's Sons, 1994). According to Damasio, "certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality (*Descartes' Error*, xxiii)". For epistemic emotions, see Reinhard Pekrun and Raymond P. Perry, "Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions," in *International Handbook of Emotions in Education*, ed. Reinhard Pekrun and Lisa Linnenbrink-Garcia (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 130–151, here 120–141.

²⁸⁶ For an approach of narrators' in ancient literature, see Matthieu P. de Bakker, Baukje van den Berg, Jacqueline Klooster, *Emotions and Narrative in Ancient Literature and Beyond. Studies in Honour of Irene de Jong* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022).

²⁸⁷ Luc Herman, Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press: 2019), 178–204; David Herman, "Cognitive Narratology," in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier and Wolf Schmid, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2014), 30–43.

²⁸⁸ For the development of research on emotion and its impact on biblical scholarship, see Scott Spencer, *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature*. RBS 90 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017).

studies, drawing from fields such as neuroscience, linguistics, and literature, yield new insights into the emotional landscape of biblical texts. Scholars conducting philological studies on the vocabulary of emotions argue that the terms in the Hebrew Bible, which are translated as emotions in modern languages, pertain to a broader and more integrated sphere of human experience than the Western concept of emotions. Biblical terms that denote emotions encompass various dimensions, including actions, ritual gestures, physical sensations, and movements. Moreover, these different dimensions of experience are not entirely dissociated. This extensive field of human experience clarifies why words such as fear (יראה), hate (שנא), joy (שמחה), and shame (בוש) possess consistently overlapping meanings with wide lexical extensions that are not confined to an individual's inner state.²⁸⁹

Contrary to the prevailing scholarly opinion that ancient societies were collectivist and anti-introspective, the last few decades have witnessed a significant and enlightening shift in research focus towards the “interior” and “private self” in antiquity. This shift has brought to light a new understanding that individuals portrayed in ancient literature were deeply interested in their inner lives.²⁹⁰ Within the Second

²⁸⁹ Françoise Mirguet, “What Is an ‘Emotion’ in the Hebrew Bible? An Experience that Exceeds Most Contemporary Concepts,” *BibInt* 24 (2016): 442–465, here 442–443 and 463–465; Françoise Mirguet, “The Study of Emotions in Early Jewish Texts: Review and Perspectives,” *JSJ* 50, no. 4–5 (2019): 557–603, here 562–569; David A. Lambert, “‘Desire’ Enacted in the Wilderness: Problems in the History of the Self and Bible Translation,” in *Constructions of the Self in Ancient Mediterranean Societies*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff and Joshua Levinson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 25–50; Philip M. Lasater, “‘The Emotions’ in Biblical Anthropology? A Genealogy and Case Study with ירא,” *HTR* 110 (2017), 520–540; Christine Abart, “Moments of Joy and Lasting Happiness: Examples from the Psalms,” in *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions: Emotions Associated with Jewish Prayer in and around the Second Temple Period*, ed. Stefan C. Reif and Renate Egger-Wenzel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 19–40; Yohanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992).

²⁹⁰ François Bovon, “The Soul’s Comeback: Immortality and Resurrection in Early Christianity,” *HTR* 103, no. 4 (2010): 387–406, here 388; Michal Beth Dinkler, “‘The Thoughts of Many Hearts Shall Be Revealed’: Listening in on Lukan Interior Monologues,” *JBL* 134, no. 2 (2015): 373–399, here 374–377; Tyler Smith, *The Fourth Gospel and the Manufacture of Minds in Ancient Historiography, Biography, Romance, and Drama*, Biblical Interpretation Series 173 (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill, 2019), 81–85.

Temple period literature, one can observe an internal self that was constantly engaged in self-examination and self-transformation. First-person singular prayers played a significant role in the emergence and manifestation of the self, a process often accompanied by arousal of emotions such as happiness, joy, jubilation, fear, grief, and distress.²⁹¹

Some scholars underscore the role of emotions in establishing power and authority in early Jewish literature. They argue that ancient Jewish authors used emotion in discourses to define the terms of power and authority while constructing and sustaining communities.²⁹² However, the role of emotions in works from that period extends beyond mere reactions compelled by socio-political realities. In their recent studies, scholars of biblical literature note that the New Testament writers invoked, evoked, represented, and recommended emotions in a myriad of ways and for multiple reasons.²⁹³ They also agree on the aura of intimacy reached through the vocabulary of emotion and affection found in these ancient sources, particularly in the Johannine literary traditions.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Carol A. Newsom, "Toward a Genealogy of the Introspective Self in Second Temple Judaism," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in Late Second Temple Period*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy Penner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 63–79; Carol A. Newsom, "Models of the Moral Self: The Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism," *JBL* 131, no. 1 (2012): 5–25; Judith H. Newman, *Before the Bible: The Liturgical Body and the Formation of Scriptures in Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁹² Ari Mermelstein, *Power and Emotion in Ancient Judaism: Community and Identity in Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 159–179.

²⁹³ Michal Beth Dinkler, "Reflexivity and Emotion in Narratological Perspective: Reading Joy in the Lukan Narrative," in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions*, ed. Spencer, 265–286, here 270. For a re-reading of 1 Peter, the Ignatian letters, the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel of John, and the Gospel of Truth via affect theory, see Maia Kotrosits, *Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence and Belonging* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

²⁹⁴ Spencer, *Passions of the Christ*, 145–260.

4.2 Emotion Language in the Ascension of Isaiah

The text of the revelatory experience 7:2–11:35 bears a significant emotional footprint, particularly in the unique aspects of Isaiah’s celestial journey. The following subsections highlight the passages, which are analysed within their closest literary context, that illustrate the emotional and body language. The excerpts are cited according to the available versions. The analysis of the verses is based on the Ethiopic translation in Ge’ez, as explained in the preliminary discussion regarding the versions available in Chapter Two (cf. esp. §2.1).

4.2.1 Joy and Happiness

The context of Isaiah’s “I rejoiced” (ወተፈሣሕኩ – *watafaśāḥaku*)” in 7:6–7 is the scene of his dialogue with the angel, set against the backdrop of the impending ascension (3–8) and the actual ascent (9). At the same time, this affect is projected by the angel to be more intense during the following vision (7:7), when Isaiah continues his journey through the firmament and the five lower heavens. The verb ተፈሣሕ (*tafaśśəḥa* – to rejoice), with the nominal *feśśəḥā* (joy), conveys a change from not being in a mood of rejoicing to being in a state of rejoicing.²⁹⁵

Note the occurrence of the first rejoice:

7:6–7

‘E’: And I rejoiced (ወተፈሣሕኩ – <i>watafaśāḥaku</i>) that he (a glorious angel) had spoken to me gently. (...) “You will see even this who is	‘S’: And I was happy (ጸላጊ ፍጥረት – <i>radū bykhū</i>), because he (an angel of glory) answered me mildly. (...) Even one greater than me you will see,	‘L ² ’: And I rejoiced (gausus sum), because he (a glorious angel) had answered me with meekness. (...) You will see someone	‘Leg’ 2:8 And I was delighted (εὐφράνθην πανο), because he (an angel of God) had spoken to me mildly.
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²⁹⁵ Cf. “rejoice”, in *English-Amharic Context Dictionary*, ed. Leslau Wolf (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1973), 1048; Mengistu Amberber, “Testing Emotional Universals in Amharic,” in *Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective*, ed. Jean Harkins and Anna Wierzbicka, Cognitive Linguistics Research 17 (Berlin / New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), 39–72, here 44–45.

greater than me, how softly and quietly he will talk to you (...)."	and meeker and more forgiving, who will want to talk with you. (...)	greater and humbler and wiser than me, who wants to talk to you (...).
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The context of Isaiah's "I rejoiced with much happiness (ወተፈሳሽኩ ፍሥካ – *watafaśāḥəku fəsəḥā*)" in 7:23 is the vision of angels praising in the second heaven, as well as the subsequent dialogue with the angel. While the 'E' version of the passage emphasises the affective relationship between the followers of the Beloved, "those who love" (ያፈቅድዎ – *yāfaqərəwo*), and the Highest and the Beloved (ወለፍቅሩ – *walafəquru*), the 'S' and 'L²' versions convey a relationship based on knowledge: "those who know."

Observe the occurrence of "rejoicing with much happiness" in the second heaven:

7:23

'E': And I rejoiced with much happiness (ወተፈሳሽኩ ፍሥካ – *watafaśāḥəku fəsəḥā*) that those who love (ያፈቅድዎ – *yāfaqərəwo*) the Highest (ለለዑል – *lalə 'lə*) and the Beloved (ወለፍቅሩ – *walafəquru*) of him to their end will ascend there by the angel of the Holy Spirit.

'S': And I rejoiced in a truly great happiness (ВЪЗРАДОВАХЪ СЯ РАДОСТИЮ ВЕЛИЕЮ ЗЪЛО – *vŭzradovakhŭ sę radostiju velijeia zĕlo*), for it is the accomplishment of those who know the Highest and eternal, and his Beloved Son, and because they ascend by the angel of the Holy Spirit.

'L²': And I rejoiced very much (*gausus sum*) with great joy (*gaudio magno ualde*), because such is the fulfilment for the one who knows the Highest and eternal, and his Beloved Son, and because the angels of the Holy Spirit, thus they ascend to him.

The context of the third "I rejoice" (ወተፈሳሽኩ – *watafaśāḥəku*) (8:22) of the visionary, elaborated upon in the speech of the guiding angel (8:25), presents a vision of angels singing praises, with Isaiah joining them in unison worship (8:16–22). Joy, happiness, and "singing a hymn" (ወሰባሕኩ – *wasabāḥəku*) reflect Isaiah's reactions to

this vision. He is promised (አሳተሰፈው – *’astasaffawa*), in 8:22, that he will be granted much more joy, “you will rejoice” (ተፈሳሕክ – *tafaśāḥəka*) (8:25), in the seventh heaven.

8:22

‘E’: and I rejoiced (ወተፈሳሕክ – *watafaśāḥəku*), and I sang a hymn to the One (ወሰባሕክ – *wasabāḥəku*) who has granted such lights to those who await his promise (ተስፋሁ – *tasəfuhu*).

‘S’: and I rejoiced very much (ВЪЗРАДОВАХЪ СЯ ЗЪЛО – *vŭzradovakhŭ sę zĕlo*) and praised (ВЪСПѢХЪ – *vŭspĕkhŭ*) him who gives such things to those who achieve his mercy.

‘L²’: I rejoiced very much (gausisus sum ualde), and I raised songs (cantui) to him who gives such joy (gaudium) to those who receive his mercy.

8:25

‘E’: And the angel, who was guiding me, understood what I was thinking, and he said: “If you have rejoiced in these lights, how much more will you rejoice (ተፈሳሕክ – *tafaśāḥəka*) in the seventh heaven (...).”

‘S’: The angel who instructed me said to me: “if you have rejoiced (ВЪЗРАДОВА СЯ – *vŭzradova sę*) in this light, how much more will you rejoice (ВЪЗРАДУЮЩИ СЯ – *vŭzraduieshi sę*) and get happy (ВЪЗВЕСЕЛИШИ СЯ – *vŭzvveselishi sę*) when you see the light of the seventh heaven (...).”

‘L²’: Therefore, the angel who taught me said to me: “Even though you rejoice (es gausisus) in this light, how much more will you rejoice (gaudebis) and exult (exultebis) when you see the light of the seventh heaven (...).”

4.2.2 Sadness, Fear and Trembling

The visionary’s confession, “I was sad” (ሐዘኝኩ – *ḥazanəku*) (8:27), unfolds against the backdrop of a significant risk – the potential interruption and failure of the Lord’s vision, promised to be granted to him in the seventh heaven. This is the same promise that would inspire Isaiah’s “rejoicing,” as foretold by the angel in 8:25. Isaiah’s distress due to this risk is reflected in the immediate context of his sadness, and the angel’s request, “Do not be sad” (ኢትሕዝን – *itəḥəzanə*) (8:28), arises from the perspective of his “return” (ገብአ – *gab’a*) in the “flesh” (ሥጋ – *śəgā*) (8:27). The verb ሐዘኝ

(*hazana*) conveys emotional states of sadness, sorrow, and mourning.²⁹⁶ Observe these passages below:

8:27–28

‘E’: “But as for the fact that you do not return in the flesh, your days are not yet completed to come here.” And as I listened, I was sad (ሐዘንኩ – *hazanaku*), and he (a glorious angel) said to me: “Do not be sad (ኢትሐዘን – *itəhəzanə*).”

‘S’: “But as for what you do not return to your flesh, the time has not come for you to come here.” Hearing this I was very sad (оскѣрѣѣхъ зѣло – *oskīrībēkhū zělo*), and he (an angel of glory) said to me: “Don't be sad (Не скѣрѣи – *Ne skīrbi*).”

‘L²’: “And as for your not coming back into your flesh, the time has not yet come to come here.” And hearing these things, I was very sad (*tristatus sum ualde*).

The fear of the visionary in the sixth heaven is echoed in the seventh heaven, “I was afraid” (ወፈራህኩ – *wafarāhaku*), and is accompanied by expressions of physical trembling, “I began trembling” (ወርዐደ ኮንኩ – *warə‘uda konaku*) (9:1). The ‘E’ document employs the verb ፈርህ (*farəha*), which conveys distress caused by danger, as well as fear in the presence of a powerful yet non-adversarial authority.²⁹⁷ This fear may have been even more intense in the original Greek document, as suggested by the ‘S’ version, “and I was very scared” (οὐβοιαχὺς ὥς ἄλλο – *uboiakh sē zělo*), and confirmed by the *Legenda Greca*, “(...) and I was seized with great fear” (ἐφοβήθην πάνυ) (‘Leg’ 2:21). “Fear” and “trembling”, presented within the same sentence,²⁹⁸ are further contextualised by Isaiah’s sadness (8:23) and his earlier “begging” to the angel not to

²⁹⁶ Amberber, *Testing Emotional Universals*, 45–48.

²⁹⁷ Amberber, *Testing Emotional Universals*, 48–50; “be afraid”, in *English-Amharic Context Dictionary*, ed. Leslau Wolf, 28.

²⁹⁸ For comparable phenomena in the Hebrew Bible, where the root ירא is associated with physical sensations like “shaking”, see Angela Thomas, “Fear and Trembling: Body Imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint,” in *The Reception of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint and the New Testament*, ed. David J. A. Clines and J. Cheryl Exum (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 115–125.

let him “return to the world of flesh” (ወእስተብቋዕከዎ ለመልእክ [...]) (ዓለም ዘሥጋ – *wa’asatabəq^w ‘əkəwo lamalə’aka [...]* ‘*alamə zaśəgā*) (8:23). This escalating stress, which culminated in intense physical manifestations of trembling (9:1), may have been even more pronounced. The ‘E’ document utilises the Ge’ez verb ርዕደ (*rə ‘ada*), which, particularly in its Amharic derivatives, often conveys bodily symptoms alongside the corresponding emotional term, such as body trembling induced by fear. In the Greek archetype, this could have been characterised as a physical state of weeping, as the *Legenda Greca* states: “Why are you weeping” (Τί κλαίεις), Isaiah? (‘Leg’ 2:35). Consequently, this study regards the visionary’s physical and emotional state of “trembling” (9:1) as likely indicative of “weeping”. The following traditions illustrate examples of resources used to convey the growth of Isaiah’s emotional stress:

9:1

‘E’: And he (a glorious angel) led me into the air of the seventh heaven, and I heard again a voice saying: “How far must go those who dwell among those strangers?” And I was afraid (ወፈረሃኩ – *wafarāhaku*), and I began trembling (ወርዕደ ኩንኩ – *warə ‘uda konəku*).

‘S’: And he (an angel of glory) lifted me up into the air of the seventh heaven. And I heard a voice saying to me: “How far will go up the one who wants to live in the flesh?” And I was very scared (ዐህቦጻኢኡ ርዕደ – *uboiakh sɛ zəlo*), and I was trembling (трѣпетѣхъ бѣхъ – *trepetīnū bykhū*).

‘L²’: And he (an angel of God) lifted me up into the air of the seventh heaven, and I heard a voice saying to me, “To what extent do you, who will live in the flesh, come here?” And I was terrified (*timui ualde*) and began to tremble (*tremefactus sum*).

Leg 2:21.33-35

And he (an angel of God) made me ascend into the sixth heaven, and I could no longer bear the splendour and the lights: and I was seized with great fear (ἐφοβήθην πάνυ) and fell on my face. (...) ³³ The Lord said to me: “Return again, Isaiah, in the garment of your flesh (ἐν τῷ σαρκός σου ἔνδυμα), you must complete the time of your life in the corruptible world (ἐν τῷ φθαρτῷ κόσμῳ).” ³⁴ And I began to beg (ἐδέηθην) him, saying: “Lord, do not send me back to that vain world.” (...) ³⁵ And I fell at his feet (ἔπεσα εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ δεόμενος), asking him not to send me into the world. And the Lord said to

me again, in addition: “Why are you weeping (Τὶ κλαίεις), Isaiah? Here is your place, here is your throne, here is your crown, here is also your garment, all this I have prepared for you.”

The narratives quoted above, rich in extraordinary rhetorical resources that leverage emotion and body language, reveal motives for their author's interest in employing language related to feelings.

The reason for Isaiah's rejoicing in 7:6-7, stemming from the angel's “mild/gentle speech” to the visionary, enhances the visionary's happiness on the occasion of the following prediction: “You will see even this who is greater than me, how softly and quietly he will talk to you” (7:7). Furthermore, the text reveals the source of Isaiah's delight, which is tied to the conditions under which the vision was obtained: “And the vision which he saw was not from this world, but from the world which is hidden from the flesh” (6:16). This condition is supported by the description of changes and the detachment of Isaiah's mind from his body (6:10). Although the corrupted flesh condition of the visionary is withdrawn only temporarily, as the angel explains through “you have to return into this body” (7:5), this shift achieved by divine determination is the reason for rejoicing.

The exact phrase “and I rejoiced” (ወተፈሳሰክ – *watafaśāḥəku*) suggests the common reason for the emotion in 7:6 and 7:23. The emotional response arises because the mind of the visionary is taken up out of the corrupted flesh, a condition essential for experiencing a vision not from this world. In 7:23, this same reason for rejoicing becomes even more significant. The process of departing from the corrupted flesh and ascending to the divine realm to join the pre-existing Beloved is accessible to all who develop and nurture an intimate relationship of love (አፍቀረ – *’afqara*) with the Beloved (ወለፍቀሩ – *walafəquru*). The Beloved shares a similar loving relationship (ፍቅር –

fəqur) with “the Highest” (ልዕለ – *lə‘la*). The passage also assures that this journey is guided by “the angel of the Holy Spirit”, who leads those in a loving relationship with the Beloved and the Highest to the divine realm after their end.²⁹⁹ Isaiah’s mind is detached from the body, enabling him to cultivate such a relationship and to worship divine beings. The angel encourages such praise (7:21), and Isaiah rejoices in 7:23.

Isaiah’s worship in the sixth heaven, in unison with angels (8:17), elevates his level of rejoicing and leads to “singing a hymn” (ወለባሕኩ – *wasabāhaku*) in 8:22. Rejoice, happiness, and praises become Isaiah’s reactions to joining the pre-existing Beloved, whose body guarantees incorruptibility, and to being granted much more in the seventh heaven. This emotional journey, triggered by the angel’s promise/hope (አሳተሰፈወ – *‘astasaffawa*), contrasts with his sadness, “I was sad” (ሐዘንኩ – *ḥazanaku*) (8:27), which is caused by the perspective of returning to the “world of flesh” (ዓለም ዘሥጋ – *‘alamə zaśəgā*) (8:23). Isaiah’s sadness is further reinforced in 9:2 by fear (ፈርህ – *farəha*) and trembling (ርዕደ – *rə‘əda*), after his access to the seventh heaven as a “foreigner/stranger” (ነኪረ – *nakir*) is challenged in 9:1. The ‘S’ version clearly explains the cause of the fear: “He who wants to live in flesh” (въ плѣти хотѣи жити – *vŭ tiplŭti hotęi žiti*) (9:1).

Sadness and fear, however, are alleviated by the image of Isaiah’s “garment” (ልብሱ *ləbs*) (9:2) prepared for him and the vision of “robes and thrones and crowns” (9:24–26) prepared for the righteous. These symbols not only fulfil the promise in 8:22

²⁹⁹ For arguments supporting the assignment of an angelical form to the Holy Spirit and the application of a guiding function to lead the faithful righteous to the seventh heaven upon their death, see Loren Stuckenbruck, “The Holy Spirit in the Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins. Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker and Stephen C. Barton, (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004), 308–320, here 316.

but also facilitate the visionary's admission to the seventh heaven and transformation into a being "like an angel" (9:30). Observe these elements in the passages below:

9:24.26

'E': ²⁴ And I saw there many garments placed, and many thrones and many crowns (አልባስ ብዙኅ ንቡረ ወመናብተ ብዙኅ ወአከሊላተ ብዙኅ – *'aləbasa bəzuḥə nəbura wamanābata bəzuḥə wa'akəlilātə*) (...) ²⁶ And (the angel) said to me: "These garments (አልባስ – *'aləbasə*), there are many of that world that will receive them (ይነሥኡ – *yənaśə'u*), having believed in the voice of him who will be called as I told you, and they will keep them and believe in him, in his cross; it is for them that they are placed."

'S': ²⁴ I saw many robes and thrones and many crowns lying, (одежа многи и прѣстолаи и вѣнцы многи и лежаша – *odeža mnogy i prěstoly i věnīca mnogy i ležaša*) (...) ²⁶ And he said to me: "Many of that world deprive themselves (лишакѹт ѡ – *lišajut sę*) of these garments, not believing the word of him about whom you were told."

'L': ²⁴ I saw many robes and thrones and crowns standing there (stolas multas et thronos et coronas iacentens), (...) ²⁶ And he said to me, "These crowns will be received (ammittunt) by many of that world who believe the words of him of whom I have spoken to you."

As we strive to draw our initial conclusions on analysing the emotional language employed by the author, it becomes clear that the visionary narratives in Ascls 7–11 are structured around the contrasting emotions of joy and sadness. These emotions are not merely expressed; they are intensified by the physical descriptions of trembling and, likely, weeping. Such descriptions serve to amplify the emotions, making them more palpable. Isaiah's hopes and fears, his humiliation while imploring the angel to continue the vision, and his eventual triumph are all vividly portrayed through the sensations of his body. The narratives, particularly those based on dialogues with the angel, are imbued with sincerity, suggesting a genuine experience.

The visionary's acts of worshipping the divine in *communitas* with heavenly beings are intricately linked to his emotional state. The experience of oneness with the cosmos in praising ensures that Isaiah rejoices, further enhancing his involvement in the heavenly journey. Consequently, he is promised a transformation into a heavenly being.

From joy to sadness, fear, and back again, Isaiah's fluctuating emotions mirror the uncertainty and certainty of the visionary's mind being detached from his body. The realisation of his temporary separation from his body provokes sadness and grief in the visionary. Simultaneously, the promise of achieving a transformed state of the Righteous sparks his rejoicing.

Furthermore, first-person speech is employed to establish the internal dynamic of the otherworldly journey, with the verbs connoting perception and interacting with the images and actions developed in the heavens. Employing the first-person pronoun is not merely a grammatical choice but rather a narrative tool that effectively conveys Isaiah's psychic states alongside their relevant bodily symptoms and immerses the visionary in the earthly-celestial ceremony.

4.3 From Emotion Language to Recreated Experiences

Recent studies on the use of highly emotional and personal language in early Jewish literature propose that emotion and body language serve as rhetorical interventions by the authors. Such a redactional intervention is believed to be a deliberate strategy to connect with the emotional sensibilities of readers and listeners. This intentional engagement on an emotional level aims to prompt a re-enactment of

the specific emotions aroused in the context of the particular subject addressed. The highly emotional and personal language employed in the Thanksgiving Hymns (1QHodayot^a) is so persuasive that scholars feel compelled to interpret these reports as genuine accounts of a real person's experience.³⁰⁰ This conviction has inspired the next generation of Scroll scholars to base their theories on these hypotheses.³⁰¹ Furthermore, scholars argue that the arousal of emotions produced in various states of affect, during individual prayers, can lead to encounters with the divine. States of affect facilitate such encounters with the divine in individual prayers through the arousal of emotions.³⁰² How does this arousal of emotions impact readers and listeners of a visionary journey composed of narratives?

The re-experience of the visionary journey is far from a passive act. It is a journey that readers or listeners actively embark on, participating in the narratives through enactive reading and the performance of the liturgical ceremonies. This active involvement, where readers or listeners become integral parts of the reenactment, is crucial. The role of emotions and body language in enactive reading and performance is essential for the active engagement of readers and listeners. The ancient authors, through referencing bodies, somatic experiences, and specific emotions undergone by characters, aimed to create an imaginal body for readers and listeners to imitate. Angela Harkins designates such an imaginal body as an affective script for transformation. This affective script, actualised through the performance of liturgical

³⁰⁰ Eleazar Sukenik, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Hebrew University* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1955), 39; Gert Jeremias, *Der Lehrer der Gerechtigkeit*, SUNT 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963), 170.

³⁰¹ Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*, 296. Newsom argues that personal and emotional narratives of life experiences in the Hodayot serve as symbols to "create a standardised experience for all members of the community."

³⁰² Abart, "Moments of Joy and Lasting Happiness", 19–40.

texts or the immersive experience of reading and hearing transformative narratives, assisted by a first-person voice, enables the reader and listener to adopt the perspective of the main character and imitate his experience.³⁰³

Rhetorical interventions that engage readers' emotions are also perceived and studied in revelatory compositions that reuse the Second Temple's apocalyptic traditions. Seers and visionaries in the Second Temple period are often portrayed as undergoing emotional states of weeping and trembling (4 Ezra 5:13, 20; 6:30–31, 35) and mourning (Dan 10:2–3). These moods of grief shift to other cognitive states that may trigger the onset of visionary experiences.³⁰⁴ The Visions of Shepherd of Hermas appeal to the pious self-diminishing practices to shape the emotional impact of narrative experiences. Accordingly, in the opening of the third Vision of Shepherd of Hermas (Vis. III.1.5), the visionary is submerged in a wave of various affective states just before the vision of the Tower. For Harkins, the function of the affective state of Hermas, embedded in this passage, resembles the emotional impact of narrative experiences found in apocalyptic visionary texts.³⁰⁵ Harkins draws on psychological insights to define the emotional impact incorporated in the Vision of Hermas as the mind's capacity to imagine and reconstruct vivid memories from his past, such as those produced from the highly descriptive portrayals of his anxiety or state of weeping.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ *Reading with an "I"*, 74–75; Looking at the *Shepherd of Hermas*, 52

³⁰⁴ For additional examples of weeping as an induction from apocalyptic literature, the Bible, and Canaanite literature, see Merkur, "Visionary Practices", 125–131. For performative expressions of grief in the composition of the Second Temple, particularly in the book of Daniel, see Angela Kim Harkins, "The Function of Prayers of Ritual Mourning in the Second Temple Period," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy Penner (Berlin / Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2017), 80–101, here 80–84.

³⁰⁵ Harkins, "Looking at the *Shepherd of Hermas*", 65. For Harkins' research, which highlights the importance of self-diminishing practices among visionaries to trigger cognitive states that may lead to visionary experiences, see Harkins, *Reading with an "I" to the Heavens*, 101–102.

³⁰⁶ Harkins, "Looking at the *Shepherd of Hermas*", 66.

In light of the research on the use of highly emotional and personal language, and building on theories of emotional language in narratives as an affective script, the use of vivid language and impassioned reports of the journey experience in Ascls 7–11 serves a specific purpose. Passages 7:6–7 and 7:23, along with 8:22, evidence how the author applies feelings of joy to the visionary, while sections 8:27–28 and 9:1 convey Isaiah’s sadness, grief, and weeping. These serve as rhetorical means to portray Isaiah rejoicing in the heavens and, abruptly, undergoing an emotional state of trembling. The author appeals to a pious self-diminishing practice identified in Isaiah’s begging the angel not to return to the “world of flesh” (8:23). Furthermore, the author’s use of emotion and vivid language, along with first-person speech, allows readers and listeners to re-experience Isaiah’s visionary journey. The visionary narrative, Ascls 7:2–11:35, engages readers and listeners, prompting them to reconstruct Isaiah’s celestial journey with an unparalleled level of detail. This includes an accurate description of the heavenly journey, the visionary’s dialogue with the angel, the lengthy quoting of the angel’s words, and the emotional language utilised by the visionary. Isaiah’s celestial journey is rich in expressions of joy and happiness (7:6–7, 23–25; 8:22–25), while his arrival at the highest part of heaven elicits feelings of sadness, fear, and a state of trembling (8:27–28; 9:1).

It is worth noting that first-person speech, in addition to its use in emotional language, is employed in “I saw”,³⁰⁷ with the verbs ܥܬܝܬܐ (rə’iku – to see) and ܥܬܝܐ (rə’aya – to see),³⁰⁸ and “I heard” (10:6), with the verb ܫܡܥܐ (sam’a – to hear, to listen

³⁰⁷ “I saw” used by the ‘E’ version in 7:2.3.9.14.19.24.29.32; 8:1; 9:6.8.9.28.33.36[2].37; 10:17.19.20.23.25.26.27.30; 11:1.2.16.17.

³⁰⁸ In ‘Leg’ 2:9.14.27, Legenda Greca applies ὁράω (εἶδον aor.).

to).³⁰⁹ This use of first-person speech effectively immerses the seer in the earthly-celestial liturgy throughout the vision: “I fell on my face to worship him” (7:21), “I praised the One” (7:37; 8:23) and “I also was singing praises with them, and my praise was like theirs” (9:28). Isaiah’s active participation in the cult is vividly conveyed through the verb *ἠΐλη* (*sabbēla*), the meaning and use of which is provided in Chapter Four (cf. § 4.2.3).³¹⁰ This affective script designed by the author invites the readers and listeners to step into the imaginal body of the visionary and be transformed. How do the readers and listeners of a narrative reconstruct the text?

The argument relies on narrative theory and embodied cognition, concepts drawn from neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, and the philosophy of mind. According to Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen, a narrative engages in dialogue with and manipulates readers’ bodies. Whether narrating in the first or third person, narrators capture physical presence within a narrative and position themselves as face-to-face characters. By immersing themselves in events and observing the gestures of the characters that shape these occurrences, readers’ attention merges with the textual instances of narrators. The intensity of the joint attention between narrators and readers emerges during the reading process. The degree to which narrators’ presence, location, and self materialise for readers depends on the level of merged attention, which is crucial for deeper engagement with the narrative.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ In ‘Leg’ 2:23.26.37, *Legenda Greca* applies *ἀκούω*.

³¹⁰ In ‘Leg’ 2:28; 3:42, *Legenda Greca* applies *προσεκύνησα* (*προσκυρέω*).

³¹¹ Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen, *With Bodies: Narrative Theory and Embodied Cognition* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press; 2021), 12.

The joint attention of the reader and narrator focuses on the corporeal experience of reading a literary narrative, thereby granting the narrator the physical presence of the reader. This physical presence attained by the narrator in the reader is also one of the key points of enactive reading theory. Enactive reading refers to the cognitive processes through which texts can be experienced via the perception of sensorimotor movement. Anežka Kuzmičová, who combines the framework of embodied cognition with text-linguistic approaches, elucidates the dynamics of this process and identifies the outcome of enaction as the reader's sense of having entered a tangible environment while reading the literary narrative. Such a sense emerges from a first-person, enactive process involving the sensorimotor areas of the mind related to simulation and resonance. These areas, activated during reading, hearing, and processing discourses that contain sentences referring to bodily movement, can produce embodied experiences.³¹²

The insights above are crucial for understanding the specific purpose of emotional and body language, as well as the first-person speech within the vivid language employed in Ascls 7–11. The author employs these elements to germinate an immersive reading experience for the narratives' readers and listeners. In these readings, the narrator achieves a physical presence in the minds of the readers and listeners of Isaiah's visionary experience. Through the joint attention of readers and listeners, the narrator, positioned vis-à-vis Isaiah in the visionary narratives, initiates an enactive process involving the sensorimotor areas of their minds. This process can

³¹² Anežka Kuzmičová, "Presence in the reading of literary narrative: A case of motor enactment," *Semiotica* 189 (2012): 23–48.

produce in the readers and listeners of the visionary narratives embodied experiences akin to those experienced by Isaiah.

These readings can produce embodied experiences in the readers and listeners of Isaiah's visionary experiences, a process that is not automatic. Empirical studies underscore the profound influence of readers' prior life experiences on the act of reading literary narratives bodily. The unique experience of reading the narratives arises from readers' accumulated memories, including their own life events and the knowledge gained through interactions with narrative worlds. A crucial aspect of this understanding derives from cognitive psychology research, which characterises readers' thoughts and emotional responses while engaging with a text. Richard J. Gerrig and Micah L. Mumper's work on readers' transportation to narrative worlds is closely tied to their tacit judgements of similarity.³¹³ The concept of transportation measures the degree to which readers feel emotionally and cognitively engaged in a particular narrative experience. It explores how readers' life experiences shape their transportation into specific narratives. Therefore, the likelihood of readers experiencing immersive and enacting readings of Isaiah's visionary narratives, producing embodied experiences akin to those undertaken by Isaiah, is greater when they perceive Isaiah as similar to themselves.

Aside from the emotional and body language, first-person speech, and the vivid character of the narratives, the dialogues between the angel and the visionary continue to captivate our attention towards the visionary account. After Isaiah's ascension to heaven, he encounters the angel (7:2), who assumes a crucial role as his

³¹³ Richard J. Gerrig and Micah L. Mumper, "How Readers' Lives Affect Narrative Experiences," in *Cognitive Literary Science. Dialogues between Literature and Cognition*, ed. Michael Burke and Emily T. Troscianko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 253.

guide through the heavens. From the initial encounter with the angel to their arrival in the seventh heaven (9:36), the visionary engages in a series of profound dialogues with the guiding angel. These dialogues typically commence with questions from the visionary, to which the angel offers insightful responses. Daniel Merkur perceives all instances of otherworldly journeys in the visionary accounts of apocalypses as message dreams interpreted by seers and explained by angels, thereby forming a dialogue. The structure of the dialogue involves open-ended questions from the visionary and angelic responses that address matters not anticipated by the seer. Such dialogues aim to inspire and induce an alternate state of consciousness, which is also reflected in the seer's emotional state fluctuating from depression to elation. In Merkur's view, the manifestation of the seer's euphoria against profound sadness and grief, temporarily putting on hold the cognitive content of the vision, was part of the ecstatic induction technique employed by Jewish apocalypticists.³¹⁴ These observations underscore the role of otherworld reports in understanding the techniques of apocalyptic visionaries and suggest the presence of a method aimed at achieving religious ecstasy.

The highlighted aspects of emotional and physical expression, the pious self-diminishment, and the visionary experiences arising from traumatic events relate to the cognitive reality of such experiences. The cognitive reality of visionary experience has often been acknowledged.³¹⁵ While Merkur underscores the use of manipulated depressed moods and bipolar mechanisms employed in Jewish apocalypses as

³¹⁴ Merkur, "The Visionary Practices", 122.

³¹⁵ Robert H. Charles, *Eschatology: A Critical History of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1999), 174. Charles remarks that: "The prophet's knowledge came through visions, trances, and through spiritual, and yet not unconscious, communion with God. Apocalyptic makes use of the same methods. The reality of the vision and trance as actual experiences no man who is familiar with modern psychology will for a moment question."

induction techniques to attain ecstatic states, DeConick observes that the mystical experiences of the early Christians may depend on the traumatic. In her view, the self-induced and voluntary dynamic of trauma is perceptible in the rituals and body techniques found in early Christian materials. She connects the distressing experience of trauma with the visionary experiences of the early Christians and appeals to cognitive science and neuropsychology to demonstrate how trauma can produce altered states of consciousness and alternate psychic states usually expressed in early Christian texts.³¹⁶

It is important to note that the schemes aimed at inducing individuals into the altered psychic state of a visionary, as observed in numerous early Jewish visionary traditions³¹⁷ and early Christian writings,³¹⁸ were active. Scholars suggest that the early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic authors actively engaged their readers and listeners through emotional language, potentially leading to visionary experiences. It is widely acknowledged that among Jews of the Second Temple period and early Christians, there existed schools, circles or communities that nurtured apocalyptic visions.³¹⁹ Techniques that produced visions were cultivated within these circles, and the emotional language that articulated these visions was actively employed.

The aforementioned views on the function of emotional language and the dynamics of trauma evident in the apocalyptic visionary narratives compel us to

³¹⁶ DeConick, "Traumatic Mysteries: Pathways of Mysticism among the Early Christians", 47–51.

³¹⁷ Merkur, "The Visionary Practices", 125–131; Harkins, *Reading with an "I"*, 102; Harkins, "The Performative Reading of the Hodayot", 55–71; Stone, *Ancient Judaism*, 104–108.

³¹⁸ Harkins observes: "Features such as the pious self-diminishing practices that Hermas regularly takes part in prior to his visionary experiences are well-known visionary practices described in other late Second Temple apocalyptic texts". For this quotation, see Harkins, "Looking at the *Shepherd of Hermas*", 58.

³¹⁹ Russell, *The Method and Message*, 132–134; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 29–30; Stone, "Lists of Revealed Things in Apocalyptic Literature", 383–384.

consider the cognitive processes underlying the visionary account of Isaiah. The dialogue format of the narratives in Ascls 7–11 is not merely a vivid depiction of Isaiah’s ascent to heaven, composed around the contrasting emotions of joy and sadness. The conversation, structured as a series of questions and responses, is purposefully redacted to induce an alternative psychic state in readers and listeners.

The following presents our interpretation of Ascls 8–9, a section comprising dialogues between the angel and the visionary set amidst the sixth and seventh heavens. This interpretation accentuates the use of the affective script and cognitive processes while also highlighting the immersive reading and listening experience that the narrative can activate.

4.4 Enacting Joy and Sadness – Traumatic Experiences

The narratives of Ascls 8–9 vividly portray the transformative journey of the visionary, transitioning from a state of depression or deliberately induced trauma to a state of elation, or hyperarousal of the cognitive system and nervous circuitry.³²⁰ To understand this process, it is necessary to observe how the seer’s depressed mood, immersed in trauma, is conveyed through emotions of sadness and fear. These emotions produce physical reactions such as begging, trembling, tears, and possibly

³²⁰ For the terminology used to describe the ecstasy cognitive process, see Edward Bever, “The Relationship of Magic and Shamanism in Neuro-Cognitive Perspective,” in *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations of Divination and Magic. Manipulating the Divine*, ed. Jesper Frøkjær Sørensen and Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Numen Book Series 171 (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill, 2021) 153–177, esp. 161–165 (“The Neuro-Cognition of Ecstatic Trance”).

weeping. However, these emotions are intertwined with joy and happiness, signifying a sudden breakthrough of religious euphoria in the visionary.

The dialogue between the seer and the guiding angel in the sixth heaven vividly traces the seer's emotional odyssey, from an initial surge of uncontrollable anxiety to the subsequent onset of grief, triggered by the motif of his inevitable "return" (ገብአ – *gab'a*) to the "flesh" (ሥጋ – *śagā*) (8:27). Isaiah's anxiety commences with the angel's announcement about his return to his corrupted condition: "You have to return into this body" (7:5). It intensifies further when the angel observes that "no man who has to return into a body of that world has come up, or seen, or understood what you have seen" (8:11). Notwithstanding this, inspired by the state of *communitas* with the heavenly beings, the seer restores his happiness and strengthens himself by worshipping in unison with the angels: "And strength was given to me, and I also sang praises with them" (8:17). The act of worship and the recall of the promise (ተሰፋሁ – *tasəfuhu*) of robes, thrones, and crowns elevate Isaiah into a mood of rejoicing: "And I rejoiced (ወተፈሣሕኩ – *watafasāhəku*) and I sang a hymn (ወሰባሕኩ – *wasabāhəku*)" (8:21). However, Isaiah's uncertainty returns, and his grief becomes evident with his plea to the angel not to return to the "world of flesh" (8:23). The seer's begging is met with the angel's compassionate response, a stark contrast to the seer's emotional state, likely consisting of verbal inspirations and predictions: "If you have rejoiced in these lights, how much more will you rejoice (ተፈሣሕኩ – *tafasāhəka*) in the seventh heaven" (8:25), "Do not be sad" (ኢትሕዝን – *itəhəzənə*) (8:28). The angel's theological discourse on the rewards for the righteous (8:26), followed by his words regarding Isaiah's imminent return to his body, "regarding your not returning to the flesh (ሥጋ – *śagā*),

your days are not yet complete for coming here” (8:27), leaves Isaiah in a state of profound uncertainty regarding his place in the incorruptible divine realm. This uncertainty is further heightened when a voice challenges Isaiah’s ascent to the seventh heaven: “How far should this one who dwells among the strangers (ነኪረ – *nakir*) ascend?” (9:1). The voice’s question exacerbates Isaiah’s anxiety, turning it into grief and desolation: “And I was afraid (ወፈረህኩ – *wafarāhəku*), and I became trembling (ወርዕድ ኮንኩ – *warə‘uda konəku*)” (9:1). This somatic description vividly portrays Isaiah’s traumatic experience and deep distress, which may have been even more intense, as the *Legenda Greca* reads: “Why are you weeping (Τί κλαίεις), Isaiah?” (‘Leg’ 2:35).

Aside from the emotional responses, the visionary reports kinesthetic movement during his otherworldly sojourn: “And he made me ascend to the sixth heaven” (8:1), “He made me ascend in the sixth heaven, and there were none on the left, nor a throne in the middle,” (8:16), and “And he guided me to the air of the seventh heaven” (9:1). These sentences not only assist but also invite the reader and listener to enter the narrative space as a virtual reality and place themselves in the divine realm. It is also noteworthy that Isaiah’s first-hand experience of moving in the middle of the angels and the righteous is reported sequentially, “And he made me ascend into the sixth heaven, and there were none on the left, nor a throne in the middle” (8:16). The lengthy advancement of the seer in the sixth heaven, with its slow pace, builds suspense and anticipation, thus creating a sense of momentum for the events of worshipping in *communitas* with the heavenly beings.

In summary, the kinesthetic details and virtual reality, combined with Isaiah’s profound experience of fluctuating and intensifying contrasting emotions of joy and sadness, which contribute to his depression, enhance the immersive quality of the

scene. This quality draws readers and listeners into the narrative, enabling them to re-enact and re-experience Isaiah's encounter with the divine. Observe the rhetorical resources below:

^{8:16} *And he made me ascend in the sixth heaven, and there were none on the left, nor a throne in the middle, but all were of one appearance, and their praise was equal.* ¹⁷ *And strength was given to me, and I also sang praises with them, and that angel also, and our praise was like theirs.* ¹⁸ *And there they all named the primal Father and his Beloved, Christ, and the Holy Spirit with one voice,* ¹⁹ *but it was not like the voice of the angels who were in the five heavens,* ²⁰ *nor was it like their speech, but there was a different voice there, and there was much light there.* ²¹ *And then, when I was in the sixth heaven, I thought that light which I had seen in the five heavens darkness.* ²² *And I rejoiced (ወተፈሳሕኩ – watafaśāḥəku), and I sang a hymn (ወሰባሕኩ – wasabāḥəku) to the One who has granted such lights to those who await his promise (ተስፋሁ – tasəfuhu).* ²³ *And I entreated the angel who was guiding me that from then on I should not return to the work of flesh.* ²⁴ *Indeed I say to you, Hezekiah and Josab, my son, and Micah, that there is much darkness here.* ²⁵ *And the angel who was guiding me understood what I was thinking and said to me, “If you rejoice over this light, how much more will you rejoice (ተፈሳሕኩ – tafaśāḥəka) in the seventh heaven when you see the light where the Lord is and his Beloved – from where I was sent – who is to be called in the world of the Son!* ²⁶ *He who is to be in the corruptible world has not yet been revealed, nor the garments, nor the thrones, nor the crowns which are placed there for the righteous, for those who believe in that Lord who will descend in your form. For the light which is there is great and wonderful.* ²⁷ *But as for the fact you do not return (ገብአ – gab’a) into the flesh (ሥጋ – śəgā), your days are not yet complete for coming here.”* ²⁸ *And when I heard this, I was sad (ሐዘንኩ – ḥazanəku); and he said to me, “Do not be sad (ኢትሕዘን – itəḥəzanə).”* ^{9:1} *And he guided me into the air of the seventh heaven, and moreover I heard a voice saying, “How far should this one who dwells among the strangers (ነኩረ – nakir) ascend?” And I was afraid (ወፈረህኩ – wafarāḥəku) and was trembling (ወርዐደኩ – warə’uda konəku).* ² *And he said to me when I was trembling, “Behold!”*

4.5 From Transformation to Religious Euphoria – Re-experiencing an Encounter with the Divine

The pivotal moment of the qualitative transformation of Isaiah's affect, from the negative to the positive, occurs when a voice is heard: "Holy Isaiah is allowed to come up here, because here is his robe" (ዝዮ ውእቲ ልብሱ – *zəya wə'etu labəsu*) (9:2), a proclamation explained by the angel. This divine intervention marks a shift in the dialogue from prediction (8:23–27) to verbal explanations provided by the angel, as well as a change in the seer's attitude. Isaiah, previously faint-hearted and weepy, now becomes credulous and submissive. His remarks are limited to requests for clarification, highlighting the progression of cognitive processes: "How is that they have received these robes, but are not on their thrones nor in their crowns?" (9:11), "Show me how everything which is done in that world is known here" (9:20), "Whose are these robes and thrones and crowns?" (9:25), as the angel initiates topics to which Isaiah responds (9:23). The seer's psychic energy, initially invested in the negative affect of a depressed mood, is now available for expansion.

Isaiah engages in a series of acts of worship, and his joy reaches its climax, particularly when the angel invites him to join in worship and sing hymns to the Lord (9:31–32). Accepting to remain in a state of oneness with the cosmos in the divine realm requires the visionary to follow the angel's recommendations obediently and partake in the coordinated liturgical activities in *communitas*: "'Worship this one,' and I worshipped and sang praises (ወሰባሕኩ – *wasabāhaku*)" (9:31). Isaiah's energy, having expanded after a previous depression, can be perceived in the vision through the inclusion of another heavenly entity for the coordinated worship in *communitas*: "The

Righteous approached him, and worshipped him, and sang praises, and I also sang praises with them.” (9:33). While the unison worship continues, another seer’s query, “Who is this one?” (9:36), suggests that the visionary’s psychic energy expands into elation, or hyperstimulation of the autonomic nervous system. Isaiah’s sadness, which previously intertwined with happiness in the sixth heaven, is now overtaken by a profound sense of joy, marking a dramatic shift into a state of religious euphoria. This ecstatic state, characterised by boundless energy, culminates in the seventh heaven, where it explodes in worship of the Holy Spirit (9:36).

Such a vivid account of the visionary’s emotional turnabout from depression to religious euphoria is construed to be re-enacted by its readers and listeners. The author facilitates the immersive reading by ensuring that Isaiah’s first-hand experience of moving in the middle of the angels and the righteous is conveyed sequentially: “While I was still speaking to him, behold one of the angels who were standing by” (9:21), “And while I was still speaking, I saw another glorious person who was like him” (9:33). Just as in the sixth heaven, the lengthy progression of the seer in the seventh heaven slows the narrative, thereby creating anticipation and momentum for the events of worshipping the Lord and the Holy Spirit. The reader gains crucial information about Isaiah, namely that he accompanied the angels and the righteous who came “and also was singing praises with them” (9:28).

The knowledge obtained from the investigation is conveyed through what Isaiah sees. He is shown books and inspects them carefully, reading, and assessing them, making the scene resemble how one might examine and evaluate new books: “(...) but not like the books of this world. And they were given to me, and I read them, and behold the deeds of the children of Israel written there” (9:22). Such scenes may be

experienced in the mind as egocentric emotional memories, where Isaiah's first-person perspective transforms the reader into a teacher or guide, facilitating the knowledge one is expected to acquire. The experience of reading this narrative would emerge from the reader's accumulated memory. Observe these rhetorical resources below:

9:2b *From there another voice which was sent out has come, and it says, "Holy Isaiah is allowed to come up here, because here is his robe (ዝዮ ውእቱ ልብሱ – zāya wə'etu labasu)."*³ *And I asked the angel who was with me and said, "Who is the one who prevented me, and who is this one who turned to me that I might go up?"*⁴ *And he said to me, "The one who prevented you, this is the one who is in charge of the praise of the sixth heaven."*⁵ *And the one who turned to you, this is your Lord, the Lord, the Lord Christ, who is to be called in the world Jesus, but you cannot hear his name until you have come up from this flesh (ሥጋ – śagā)."*⁶ *And he took me up into the seventh heaven, and there I saw a wonderful light, and also angels without number.*⁷ *And there I saw all the righteous from the time of Adam onwards.*⁸ *And there I saw the holy Abel and all the righteous.*⁹ *And there I saw Enoch and all who were with him, stripped of their robes of the flesh (ሥጋ – śagā); and I saw them in their robes of above, and they were like angels who stand there in great glory.*¹⁰ *But they were not sitting on their thrones, nor were their crowns of glory on them.*¹¹ *And I asked the angel who was with me, "How is that they have received these robes, but are not on their thrones nor in their crowns?"*¹² *And he said to me, "They do not receive the crowns and thrones of glory – nevertheless, they do see and know whose (will be) the thrones and whose the crowns – until the Beloved descends in the form in which you will see him descend."*¹³ *The Lord will indeed descend into the world in the last days, (he) who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form, and they will think that he is flesh and a man.*¹⁴ *And the god of that world will stretch out [his hand against the Son], and they will lay their hands upon him and hang him upon a tree, not knowing who he is.*¹⁵ *And thus his descent, as you will see, will be concealed even from the heavens so that it will not be known who he is.*¹⁶ *And when he has plundered the angel of death, he will rise on the third day and will remain in the world for five hundred and*

forty-five days. ¹⁷ And then many of the righteous will ascend with him, whose spirits do not receive their until the Lord Christ ascends and they ascend with him. ¹⁸ Then indeed they will receive their robes and their thrones and their crowns, when he has ascended into the seventh heaven.” ¹⁹ And I said to him what I had asked him in the third heaven, ²⁰ “Show me how everything which is done in that world is known here.” ²¹ And while I was still speaking to him, behold one of the angels who were standing by, more glorious than that angel who had brought me up from the world, ²² showed me some books, but not like the books of this world; and he opened them, and the books had writing in them, but not like the books of this world. And they were given to me, and I read them, and behold the deeds of the children of Israel were written there, their deeds which you know, my son Josab. ²³ And I said, “Truly, nothing which is done in this world is hidden in the seventh heaven.” ²⁴ And I saw there many garments placed there, and many thrones and many crowns (አልባሰ ስህረ ወመናብተ ስህረ ወአክሊላተ ስህረ – ‘alābasa bəzuḥə nəbura wamanābata bəzuḥə wa ‘akəlilātə), ²⁵ and I said to the angel who was guiding me, “Whose are these robes and thrones and crowns?” ²⁶ And he said to me, “These garments (አልባሰ – ‘alābasə), there are many from that world who will receive (ይገኙኩ – yəḡnaśə ‘u) them through believing in the words of that one who will be named as I have told you, and they will keep them, and believe in them, and believe in his cross; for them are these placed here.” ²⁷ And I saw one standing there whose glory surpassed that of all, and his glory was great and wonderful. ²⁸ And when they saw him, all the righteous whom I had seen and the angels came to him. And Adam and Abel and Seth and all the righteous approached first and worshiped him, and they all praised him with one voice, and I also was singing praises with them, and my praise was like theirs. ²⁹ And then all the angels approached, and worshipped, and sang praises. ³⁰ And he was transformed and became “like an angel” (ከመ መልእክ – kama male ‘aka). ³¹ And then the angel who was guiding me said to me, “Worship this one,” and I worshipped and sang praises (ወሰባሕኩ – wasabāhəku). ³² And the angel said to me, “This is the Lord of all the praise which you have seen.” ³³ And while I was still speaking, I saw another glorious person who was like him, and the Righteous approached him, and worshipped him, and sang praises, and I also sang praises with them; but his glory was not transformed to accord with their form. ³⁴ And then the angels approached and worshipped him. ³⁵ And I saw the Lord and the second angel,

and they were standing,³⁶ and the second one whom I saw was on the left of my Lord. And I asked the angel who was guiding me and I said to him, “Who is this one?” And he said to me, “Worship him, for this is the angel of the Holy Spirit who has spoken in you and also in the other Righteous.”

The above reading reveals how the author of Ascls Part One crafted an affective script that transformed the visionary narrative into an immersive experience for its ancient readers and listeners. They likely found the Ascls 8–9 text not only appealing but also deeply engaging. They conceivably experienced the events as though they were part of the visionary first-person story, responding emotionally with a blend of sadness, worry, and religious euphoria. Ascls Part One was not merely read or listened to, but enacted in the context of prophetic cults. In these readings, the narrator gradually emerged from the joint attention of the devoted readers, along with the textual instance of the prophet, to the events of the visionary account. The narrator's presence was felt in the sensorimotor areas of the readers' and listeners' minds, ultimately producing embodied experiences akin to those depicted in Ascls 6:10–12.

This section also introduces the cognitive reality of the visionary experience. The cognitive processes involved in reading and listening to visionary narratives by the contemporaneous addressees of such texts can activate a reader's transformation, enabling them to reenact the visionary experience. To assess the extent to which the affective script in the visionary account of Isaiah can initiate such processes, the narrative in Ascls 8–9 is analysed. The assessment reveals a process of deliberately induced trauma and a hyperarousal state in the cognitive system and nervous circuitry of the visionary, activated by the affective script embedded in the text. While this process may produce an alternate psychic state in the reader and listener, an

immersive and embodied reading of this narrative can still reinforce cognitive processes. The examples of detailed and concrete language in the visionary narrative suggest that its immersive reading produces embodied experiences in the reader and listener. Such experiences could be akin to those of the visionary.

4.6 From Transformation in Ecstasy to Conversion

This subsection discusses Isaiah's ascent to heaven (6:10–12), which serves as a prelude to the revelation conveyed through the narratives in the more substantial part of 7:2–11:35.

The author points to the absence of intellect in the body of the prophet (6:10.17), changes in his body and behaviour (6:10–12), and intense mental activity (6:12). Since the prophets surrounding him recognise his ecstatic state, understand it (6:14), and continue to praise while standing before Isaiah (11:36), it is plausible to consider the alterations in the visionary state, the changes in his body, and the visions he experienced as expected outcomes resulting from the preparation undertaken by the circle of prophets in the earlier phases of the ritual. Observe the elements of transformation in the passages analysed below:

4.6.1 Absence of Intellect

Four versions, 'S', 'L', 'E', and 'Leg', are in harmony regarding the turning point in the prophetic ritual. The visionary's unexpected silence, "he suddenly fell silent" (ἄνιστος – *vūizap*) (6:10a), signifies a shift in Isaiah's behaviour. From "speaking in the Holy Spirit" (ይጥናር በመንፈስ ቅዱስ – *yəṭənāggar bamanāfas qəddus*), he transitions to

“silence” (አርመመ – *’arəməmə*) when his “intellectual faculty is taken away” (ወሕሊናሁ ተጎሥኦ – *wahəllinnāhu tanəsə’a*), i.e., the visionary’s human intellect, in its functions, is enraptured (6:10b).

The transformation in the visionary’s behaviour, interpreted as an enraptured state of the human intellect in its functions, is reinforced by the ‘E’ (6:10, 6:11, and 6:17) and ‘C^{akh}’ (6:10) versions. The ‘E’ version, employing the verb ነሥኦ (*naśə’a* – to raise, to take away), conveys the event as “his mind was taken up from him” (ወሕሊናሁ ተጎሥኦ – *wahəllinnāhu tanəsə’a*) (6:10) and “the mind of his flesh was raised up from him” (ወሕሊና ሥጋቡ ተጎሥኦ – *wahəllinnā śəgābu tanəs’a*) (6:11). The ‘C^{akh}’ version, which utilises αιων (aeon), connoting a meaning of life, змт, зтмз (mind) with the verb ባ, ቁይ, ባ- (to lift, to take), communicates the occurrence as: “this aeon he took from his mind” (οὗτε ἡπιαίων ἀφῆι ἔμπροσθεν – *ouə mpiaiōn affəi khmpfhē*) (6:10).

The ‘Leg’ version presents a direct interpretation of Isaiah’s behavioural anomaly as ecstasy, stating that “He (Isaiah) fell into ecstasy” (ἐγένετο ἐν ἔκστασει), and further explains: “His intellect was lifted from this world” (ἦρθη ὁ διαλογισμὸς αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) (Leg 2:1). The Greek term διαλογισμὸς is probably equivalent to the Ethiopic ሕሊና (*həllinnā* – mind, intelligence), used in “the intelligence of this world was taken up from him” (ተጎሥኦ ጥበብ – *tanəsə’a təbabazə*) (6:17), which refers to the enrapture of human intellect in its functions.

The aforementioned examples of verses from various translations are crucial for understanding the removal of the seer’s intellectual faculties and cognitive functions. However, the verb ነሥኦ (*naśə’a*) stands as the central element in this analysis, as it serves as the key to comprehending the phenomenon of taking away

mind and intelligence. Note in the passages how the verb ነሥኦ (*naśə'a*) is utilised in the

'E' version and how other versions convey this phenomenon:

6:10

'E': While he was speaking in the Holy Spirit (ይትናገር በመንፈስ ቅዱስ – *yəṭənāggar bamanāfas qəddus*), while all were listening, he fell silent (አርመመ – *'arəməmə*), his mind was taken up from him (ወሕለናሁ ተንሥኦ – *waḥəllinnāhu tanəsə'a*) and he himself could not see (አይፈለድም – *'iyəre'ayomu*) the men who were standing in front of him.

'Cakh': And in the hour [... Ho[l[y], while they were all listening, they became [...] of this aeon he took from his mind (ዐሃዩ ማጠቃለል – *ouə mpiaiōn affəi khmpfhē[t]*) [...] the men who stood before him.

'S': While he was speaking in the Holy Spirit Глаголющю же ѿмоу свѣтъимъ Догхъмъ – *Glagoliuštju zhe iemu svętyimŭ dukhŭmŭ*) to be heard by all, he suddenly fell silent (вънзавоу оумѣлъче – *vŭnzapu umŭlŭche*), and no longer saw (къ томоу не видѣше – *i kŭtomu ne viděše*) those who stood before him.

'L²': While he was indeed speaking in the Holy Spirit (Loquente uero eo in Spiritu sancto) and everyone was hearing him, he immediately (statim tacuit) fell silent. And from that moment they saw someone standing in front of him.

'Leg' 2:1

(...) and after the great prophet Isaiah sat down on the king's bed, he fell into ecstasy (ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκστάσει), and his intellect was lifted up from this world (καὶ ἦρθη ὁ διαλογισμὸς αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου).

4.6.2 Changes in Body

The enraptured intellect involves changes in the main character's body and behaviour. The author emphasises this effect on the visionary's loss of perceptual senses, along with his visual and oral communication skills.

The 'E' and 'S' versions state that "he could not see" (አይፈለድም – *'iyəre'ayomu* / къ томоу не видѣше – *i kŭtomu ne viděše*) (6:10b), despite his "open eyes"

(ወሐይንቲሁስ ከሠታት – *wa'a'əyyəntihusa kaśutatə* / Опи же ѿго вѣшете отъверстѣ –

Oči že iego vëašete ðtvîřístě / *Oculi autem eius erant aperti*) (6:11). The ‘E’ and ‘C^{akh}’ versions indicate that the visionary’s “mouth got silent” (ወሐፋሁኒ ያሪምም – *wa’afahuni yarimm*) / τῡπαεισε nascετπε – *tfpaaicε nascεtpε*). In contrast, the ‘S’ and ‘L²’ versions state that his “mouth was shut” (Ἰστα же его затворена – *usta že ego zatworena* / *os uero clausum*) (6:11). Finally, the ‘E’ and ‘S’ versions convey that Isaiah’s “breath was upon him” (እስትንፋሱሰ ሀሎ ላዕሌሁ – *’astenfāsusa hallo la’ālehu* / вѣдоуновениіе доуха – *vūdounovenije dukha*) (6:12a). Meanwhile, the redactor of ‘Leg’ interprets the visionary’s body and behaviour state as “he fell into ecstasy” (ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκστάσει) (2:1).

6:11

‘E’: And his eyes were open, (ወሐፋይንቲሁሰ ከሥታት – *wa’a’ayyāntihusa kasutatā*), his mouth got silent (ወሐፋሁኒ ያሪምም – *wa’afahuni yarimm*), and the mind of his flesh was raised up from him (ወሕለና ሥጋቡ ተንሥኦ እምላዕሌሁ – *wahəllinā śəgābu tanəs’a ’amālā’aləhu*).

‘C^{akh}’: [...] and his mouth got silent (τῡπαεισε nascετπε – *tfpaaicε*

‘S’: His eyes were open (Οψι же ѱго вѣашете ωтвѣрѣстѣ – *Oči že iego vëašete ðtvîřístě*), his mouth closed (Ἰστα же его затворена – *usta že ego zatworena*).

‘L²’: But his eyes were open (*Oculi autem eius erant aperti*), while his mouth was closed (*os uero clausum*).

6:12a

‘E’: However, his breath was upon him (እስትንፋሱሰ ሀሎ ላዕሌሁ – *’astenfāsusa hallo la’ālehu*), (...).

‘S’: But the vital breath (Обаѣ вѣдоуновениіе доуха – *Obače vūdounovenije dukha*) was with him.

‘L²’: (...) but the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was with him (*inspiratio sancti Spiriti erat cum illo*).

4.6.3 Intense Mind Activity

The profound changes in Isaiah’s body and behaviour, as described in passage 6:12, testify to the depth of his visionary experience. The text states, “He was seeing a vision” (ራእየ ይፈኢ – *rā’āya yārē’i*) (6:12b), a sentence that, while absent in the ‘S’ and

‘L’ versions, appears to be original as it is echoed in 6:15: “The vision he saw (ወራእይሰ ዘርእየ – *wara ’əyāsa zarə ’āya*), it was not from this world, but from the world which is hidden from its flesh.” The ‘E’ version further elaborates, describing Isaiah’s body as resembling a corpse, with his mind intensely engaged in a vision from the other world: “The intelligence of this world was taken up from him, as (by) the one who died” (ከመ ዘጭተ – *kama zamota*) (6:17). This confirms the close connection between the phenomenon of the visionary experience, the enraptured intellect, and the profound changes in the body and behaviour of the visionary. The redactor of ‘Leg’ also interprets the separation of Isaiah’s soul from his body as the experience of a vision in the heavens and listening to the divine (‘Leg’ 2:4).

Little can be said about the duration of the vision. Only ‘Leg’ enigmatically informs us that the entire process of the vision during the stage of ecstasy lasted “three days and three nights” (ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ νύκτας) (Leg 2:2), which may have a symbolic background.³²¹

6:12b

‘E’: (...), since he was seeing a vision (ራእየ ይፈኢ – *rā ’āya yārē ’i*).

‘Leg’ 2:4: (...) and when the great prophet Isaiah had seen (εἶδεν) in the heavens, the extraordinary works, (...) and had heard (ἤκουσεν) the ineffable and secret words of God: then his soul also returned to his body (επέστρεψεν καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ).

6:17

‘E’: (...) but the high officials, the eunuchs and the people did not hear (ኢሰጦሁ – *’isāmā ’u*), (...) and the people truly did not hear (ኢሰጦሁ – *’isāmā ’u*), (...) when the intelligence of this world was taken up from him (Isaiah) (ተጎሥኦ ጥበበዝ – *tanāsā ’a təbabazə*), as (by) the one who died.

³²¹ For the symbolic meanings of the time it took for the revelation to Enoch, see Basil Lourié, “Calendrical Elements in 2 Enoch,” in *New Perspective on 2 Enoch. No Longer Slavonic Only*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov, Gabriele Boccaccini (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 191–219, here 191–220.

‘Leg’ 2:2

And when that happened, the memorialist Somnas began to say that holy Isaiah was dead. But then King Hezekiah entered and took his hand and recognised that he was not dead, but he had been lifted up (ἀλλ’ ἀνελήφθη), that is, he (Isaiah) had been transferred (ἤγουν μετέστη): because the breath of life was in him (ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐμφύσημα ζωῆς).

In sections 6:10–12, the author conveys the ecstatic phenomenon experienced by the main prophet as a result of the cultic event performed by a group of prophets. The displacement of the prophet’s intellect, changes in his body and behaviour, the seer’s deficiency of perception, and considerable cognitive activity, which relate to the sage’s mind being immersed in a vision, suggest an ecstatic experience of religious euphoria for the visionary.

Notably, the technical analysis of the psycho-somatic reactions in the visionary, designated by the ‘Leg’ version as ecstasy, suggests that the author of this passage is deeply familiar with these phenomena. The emphasis on the height of ecstatic passion reached by the seer is unsurprising, as the prophetic ritual resembles the patterns of Merkavah mysticism. The *havurah* account provides detailed instructions on how one ascends or descends and who does so (HekhR §§ 203–204), indicating that both accounts assume prior preparation before reaching the ecstatic experience.³²² The similarity is also observed in the removal of the seers’ intellectual faculties and cognitive functions in both traditions. In the account of R. Nehunya b. Haqana recalled from the ecstasy, the body that ascends and undergoes an otherworldly journey is

³²² For methods and techniques used in Jewish mysticism to achieve a state of ecstatic ascension, see Moshe Idel, “On the Language of Ecstatic Experience in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Religionen—Religiöse Erfahrung; Religions—The Religious Experience*, ed. Tilo Schabert and Matthias Riedl (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008), 39–84; Ron Margolin, *Inner Religion in Jewish Sources. A Phenomenology of Inner Religious Life and its Manifestation from the Bible to Hasidic Texts*, trans. Edward Levin (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), esp. 159–172 (“Mystical Experience in the Study of Religion”).

described as a “spirit”, i.e., the entity that differs from the corporeal body. This aspect of the *havurah* account description aligns with the divestment of corporeality, which scholars in Jewish mysticism identify as a “stripping away of corporeality” (*hitpashetut hagashmiyyut*).³²³ Another example of the ecstatic ascent, where scholars perceive a clear element of corporeal divestment, is the case of Enoch, whose body was elevated and transformed into the angelic world (3 Enoch 1:1–7).³²⁴ After Rabbi Ishmael ascends to heaven and is admitted to the vision of the Merkavah, Metatron reveals himself as Enoch, who had been transformed into an angelic being through the divestment of corporeality. This procedure echoes apocalyptic literary traditions in which protagonists were admitted to the seventh heaven.³²⁵

Our attention is drawn to the author’s emphasis on Isaiah’s enrapture of the human intellect. This focus is a key element that underscores the profound nature of Isaiah’s transformation and the transformation of readers and listeners of *Ascls Part One*, who are inspired to enact his visionary story through their immersive reading.

As noted earlier, the motif of the main prophet’s removal of intellectual skills is employed in a third-person speech on three occasions. This is first observed in 6:10, further elucidated in 6:11, and solidified in 6:17 through the prophet’s confirmation that Isaiah’s intellectual skills have been removed. This essential change in the prophet’s body, which enables him to ascend and embark on a heavenly journey, is also evidenced in his account of the vision. The divine determination to permit Isaiah to enter the seventh heaven “because here is his robe (ዝየ ውእቱ ልብሱ – *zəya wə’etu ləbəsū*)” (9:2) indicates his conversion. The

³²³ Annelies Kuyt, *The ‘Descent’ to the Chariot. Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the Yeridah in Hekhalot Literature*, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 45 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 77–80, 90–92; Schiffman, “The Recall of Rabbi Neḥuniah”, 269.

³²⁴ (HekhR §§ 16–19).

³²⁵ Schaffer, *The Origins*, 76, 82–83, 96–97.

prophet's transformation from a human to a heavenly being, characterised by being “stripped of robes of the flesh (ሥጋ – *śəgā*)” (9:2), is anticipated by the author through the phrase, “his mind was taken up from him” (ወሕሊናሁ ተጎሥኦ – *waḥəllinnāhu tanəśə'a*) (6:10), reinforced by “the mind of his flesh was raised up from him” (ወሕሊና ሥጋቡ ተጎሥኦ እምላዕሌሁ – *waḥəllinā śəgābu tanəśə'a 'əmələ'ələhu*) and solidified in “the intelligence of this world was taken up from him” (ተጎሥኦ ጥበበዝ – *tanəśə'a ṭəbabazə*) (6:17).

The author captures the attention of readers and listeners regarding this element of the prophet's ceremony. The account of the prophet's transformation, conveyed through third-person narration and demonstrating the author's expertise in psycho-somatic processes and ecstatic dynamics, engages the interest of both readers and listeners. They would find this narrative compelling, generating a sense of suspense and anticipation. The subsequent account of the transformation, presented through Isaiah's first-person speech, serves as the momentum to re-enact Isaiah's conversion during the immersive reading experience.

Conclusion

This Chapter explores sections of the visionary account Ascls Part One, which reveals signs in the human body that signify an encounter with the divine. Our understanding of the internal traces of the visionary religious experience is partly derived from our introspection regarding the signs located outside the visionary. In the previous Chapter, concepts and tools from ritual studies, along with our insight into early Christian and Jewish visionary traditions helped us comprehend how subjective elements of the cultural environment influenced participants of similar rituals in the

past to create a state of *communitas* and experience the divine. In this Chapter, insights from cognitive sciences into processes in the body and mind of the visionary and the paths opened by scholars studying religious experience in early Jewish and Christian literature serve to foreground the analysis of the aspects of the visionary's experience located within the visionary.

By examining selected passages, this Chapter reveals sections of the narratives in Ascls 7–11 that hold the power to construct an imaginal body for readers and listeners, thereby profoundly impacting their engagement with the text. These narratives possess the potential to initiate personal transformation, guiding readers and listeners to re-enact Isaiah's heavenly journey and encounter the divine. Reading Ascls 8–9, in light of concepts from the humanities and studies developed by scholars on ecstatic experiences in the literature of the period, unveils a technique to trigger cognitive and somatic processes in readers and listeners who engage in dialogues between the visionary and the angelic figure. This technique aims to elicit a range of emotions, from extreme happiness to profound sadness, in those actively re-enacting the narratives through immersive reading. Our analysis demonstrates that the alternate psychic states induced by these narratives can lead to a sudden change in the minds of readers and listeners, triggering feelings of elation and religious euphoria as one experiences a profound sense of oneness with oneself, heavenly beings, and divine entities. Lastly, the examination of passage 6:10–12, identified as the description of the ascent to heaven articulated in ecstatic terms, highlights the author's focus on Isaiah's transformation from human to heavenly being. This section, positioned centrally in Ascls 6, compels readers and listeners of Ascls Part One to engage in immersive

reading, compelling them to re-enact the subsequent narratives and re-experience Isaiah's transformation and profound oneness with the divine.

These findings raise questions about the existence of literary traditions, which demonstrate the immersive readings by readers and listeners of Ascls Part One. The following Chapter addresses this concern and examines the re-actualisation of the visionary account and its re-adaptation to confront new challenges.

Chapter Five: The Encounter of the Saints and Believers with the Beloved

Introduction

Chapters Three and Four investigate the traces of religious experience in Ascls Part One. The first approach, drawing on anthropological and sociological studies, places a strong emphasis on the communal nature of subjective experience. It underscores the influence of rituals on the body and is particularly significant for understanding the assembly of prophets. In a communal act coordinated by *communitas*, they worship the divine in harmony with heavenly beings, fostering a sense of connection and oneness with the cosmos. The subsequent approach, rooted in cognitive literary theory and cognitive processes, unveils the transformative power of emotional language and mechanisms embedded in visionary narratives. It offers a fascinating insight into how these narratives can trigger cognitive processes in the minds of ritual practitioners, compelling them to engender otherworldly experiences and transforming both readers and listeners in the process.

Chapter Five explores the manifestation of religious experiences in Ascls Part Two, which continues the material from Ascls Part One. This raises the question of whether these experiences, akin to Isaiah's encounter with the divine, also embody a

communal character. There are compelling indications that the author of the Ascension of Isaiah exhibits a strong interest in the human experience of the divine, a theme that persists from Ascls Part One to Ascls Part Two.

The author of the Greek original of the entire Ascension of Isaiah (Chs. 1–11) reintroduces the theological concept of the renewed world achieved through the mission of the Beloved. He strengthens the belief of “many believers who believed in the ascension into heaven” (2:9) to receive heavenly robes, thrones, and crowns in the future (4:16). The complete visionary account of Isaiah, incorporated in the document of the Ascension of Isaiah, further underscores this intention. Additionally, at the beginning of the writing (1:1–6a), the narrative themes from Ascls Part One are evoked, creating a sense of continuity and connection. Finally, the readers are reminded of the announcement of the second coming of the Beloved (4:14–18). This announcement, along with the narrative themes from Ascls Part One, evoked in Ascls 1:1–6a, indicates the evolution of the main theme from the chronologically first stage of the apocalypse.

The eschatological expectations of the prophetic circle, namely, life among the Righteous in the divine realm, are significantly cultivated in Ascls Part One. This is accomplished through active participation in the prophetic assemblies. This study, in Chapters Three and Four, demonstrates the significant role of narratives within a liturgical communitarian context. These narratives, when read and listened to, had the capacity to induce communities and individuals from the past to ascend to the divine realm. Given the strong continuity with Ascls Part One, particularly regarding the concept of realised eschatology, it is anticipated that the purpose of the narratives in Ascls Part Two aligns with the normative themes of Ascls Part One, placing a significant

emphasis on religious experience. This continuity connects the narratives and their purposes, providing a cohesive understanding of the eschatological expectations.

Given the continuity of narrative themes from Ascls Part One to Ascls Part Two, I argue that the Ascension of Isaiah, as a complete work, reveals signs of encounters with the divine. This document, produced by the second author, is based on the visionary account of Isaiah and provides evidence of religious experiences suggesting repetitive and performative practices of ascension to heaven undertaken by the author and members of his community. Passages 2:9–11, 3:19, and 4:13 indicate that the prophets and interpreters re-experienced the encounter with the divine from Ascls Part One and re-actualised its meaning for the new reality. One possibility is that the practices of heavenly journeys inspired a group of interpreters and scribes, closely related to the visionary circle of prophets, thereby triggering the longstanding cognitive process of visionary experience. In this process, their bodies learn by accumulating embodied knowledge, shaping new meanings, and channelling visionary experiences.

The concept of the re-actualisation of visionary accounts³²⁶ and the idea that immersive readings of visionary reports from ancient apocalypses led to further writings³²⁷ are central to the argument in this Chapter. According to the notion of the re-actualisation of visionary accounts, in the earliest stages of early Jewish and

³²⁶ Luca Arcari, "P. Oxy. 1.5 and the *Codex Sangermanensis* as 'visionary living texts': visionary habitus and processes of 'textualization' and/or 'scripturalization' in *Late Antiquity, in Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics*, ed. Valentino Gasparini, Maik Patzelt, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke and Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli in cooperation with Elisabeth Begemann (Berlin / Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2020), 469–492, here 471–73..

³²⁷ Harkins, "Experiencing the Shepherd of Hermas," 130–131. For a similar idea applied (1) to the studies of the Shepherd of Hermas, see Luca Arcari, "P. Oxy. 1.5 and the *Codex Sangermanensis* as "visionary living texts", 487–488; and (2) to the studies of early Jewish and Christian apocalypses, see Luca Arcari, *Vedere Dio. Le apocalissi giudaiche e protocristiane (IV secolo a.C. – II secolo d.C.)* (Rome: Carocci editore, 2020), 149–158.

Christian texts, proto-texts of visionary accounts were viewed as living texts capable of activating experiences of contact with the divine realm. Visionary accounts were re-adapted through an interpretative cognitive mechanism as they were listened to and read, particularly through immersive reading processes (cf. also § 1.5).

As the author of the Ascension of Isaiah reintroduces Ascls Part One alongside his own section, Ascls Part Two, this Chapter begins by addressing the preliminary aspects of the transmission and interpretation of the first chronological part, as well as the interpretation of the prophecies in Ascls Part Two. The first section of the Chapter focuses on questions concerning the roles of interpreters and prophets in Ascls Part Two. These questions relate to the interpreters' role in the transmission of Ascls Part One and their functions in interpreting the prophecies in Ascls Part Two. Additionally, this section explores the essence, form, and method used in interpretation practices. The second section examines passages 3:18–20 and 4:13, which reveal a surprising confession from the author regarding his experience of seeing the Beloved. In the context of the immersive reading concept, the author's statement reflects his experience of encountering the divine as interpreted through section 11:19-33 of Ascls Part One. The final part of the Chapter analyses the narrative in 2:9-11 through the frameworks of re-actualisation theories of visionary accounts and immersive reading. This assessment reveals how the ancient readers and listeners of Ascls Part One, in their interpretation of its narratives, underwent profound processes of visionary experience.

5.1 Prophets and Interpreters – the Community of the Beloved

5.1.1 Prophetic Guild

There is a growing consensus among scholars that the writing reflects the desire and outcomes of a guild, a self-defined prophetic community,³²⁸ and possibly itinerant prophets.³²⁹ This community is actively engaged in defending and validating their experiences of heavenly ascents.³³⁰ They maintain their visionary traditions within a Jewish milieu and are deeply involved in the exegesis of scripture, particularly the Book of Isaiah. Their conclusion is that Christ is a heavenly figure, possesses a divine nature, and is equivalent to God. They believe that Christ will destroy the powers that operate in historical persons and earthly events, as well as the forces of evil occupying the lowest level of the heavens. In essence, through their interpretation of traditions about Jesus, the members of the prophetic community introduce the core revelation, which was purportedly made to Isaiah, that by Christ's divine nature and power to defeat the rebel angels, God keeps everything in the universe under control. This reading of present and earthly circumstances in relation to Christ, which occurs in light of the

³²⁸ For a communitarian concept of the authors of the Ascension of Isaiah and its denominations, see Meghan Henning and Tobias Nicklas, "Questions of Self-Designation in the Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 175–98.

³²⁹ Piovanelli, "A Door into an Alien World", 129.

³³⁰ Acerbi, *L'Ascensione di Isaia*, 217–253 and 269–282; Robert G. Hall, "The Ascension of Isaiah: Community Situation, Date, and Place in Early Christianity," *JBL* 109, no. 2 (1990): 289–306; Norelli, *L'Ascensione di Isaia.*, 167–173, 235–248 and 271–275; Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 36–66; David Frankfurter, "Beyond 'Jewish Christianity'. Continuing Religious Sub-Cultures of the Second and Third Centuries and their Documents," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 131–143.

supernatural world, compels the readers to restructure their religious system and make it resilient to difficulties and contradictions.³³¹

In Ascls Part Two, the prophetic circle and beneficiaries of the visionary experience are embroiled in a genuine controversy with “wicked elders and shepherds” (3:24) who “neglect” (3:31) the prophetic vision. This controversy is depicted through the traditional narrative model, in which a false prophet incites an evil king to persecute a true prophet. The legend of the death of Isaiah, who was sawed in two by the wicked King Manasseh, is woven into this story. The fictional setting in Ascls 1–5 serves as a prediction of the apostasy of Manasseh, the son of King Hezekiah, a friend of the prophet Isaiah who witnesses the ecstatic experience described in Ascls 6–11. The account of Isaiah’s dramatic confrontation with Hezekiah’s son and the false prophet Belchira, culminates in Isaiah’s martyrdom (5:1–16). Belchira’s anger stems from the fact that, through Isaiah’s vision of the descent and ascent of the Beloved recounted in Ascls 6–11, the prophet reveals that Sammael/Beliar, who inspired Manasseh to reject this vision, is an impostor in this world.

This narrative vividly portrays the deteriorating situation in Christian communities (3:21–31) caused by the intense conflict between the prophetic group to which the author belongs and their adversaries. He views his context as a scene of contention between the group of prophets and false prophecy, framing the traditional literary subject of the conflict between true and false prophets. The author references the group of visionaries associated with Isaiah, “the prophets who were with him” (3:1, 6–7; 5:13), who were marginalised (3:27) by the corrupt ecclesiastical authorities,

³³¹ Enrico Norelli, “Why did Early Believers in Jesus Write Apocalypses?” ZAC 20, no. 1 (2016): 63–83, here 70–71, 82–83.

described as false prophets (3:21–31). The author highlights the attitudes of false prophecy: the abandonment of the prophecy of the twelve apostles, internal divisions, corruption among the priests, withdrawal from following the prophecies of individuals in the past, and rejection of the vision of Isaiah. Thus, the story of Isaiah, who is persecuted and instigated by Belchira, establishes a model of the community of prophets that opposes the church of elders and pastors.³³²

To confront this situation, the author supports the redemptive mission (3:19; 4:13) conveyed through the visionary account and achieved by means of the prophetic ritual celebrated in *communitas* in Ascls Part One. Relaunching the visionary account of Isaiah (Ascls Part One) with additional narrative material (Ascls Part Two) (Ascls 1:5–6) was urgently necessary to address this deteriorating situation within Christian communities and to reaffirm and revitalise the posture developed in the visionary part (1:5–6).

5.1.2 Circle of Interpreters

The author of the entire work employs the visionary narrative Ascls 7–11 to legitimise his aim, primarily to compose a new *Vision of Isaiah* (3:13–5:1). The critical point appears to be the understanding of the redemptive mission from Ascls Part One within the context of “the rest of the words of the vision” (ወትራፋተ ነገረ ራእይ – *watərāfate nagara rā’əyə*) (4:19a), that is, in relation to certain prophecies located in specific sections of the book of Isaiah. These sections are interpreted to support the

³³² Acerbi, *L’Ascensione di Isaia*, 217–233.

argument that the revelatory experience regarding the redemptive mission of the Beloved had already been conveyed through the prophecies of the prophet Isaiah.

Questions arise regarding the identity of the interpreters, as the author does not introduce them explicitly. The group of interpreters is identified in Ascls Part One. Hezekiah, one of the closest to Isaiah and his privileged interlocutor, as well as the hearer of his vision, can be seen as a representative of the interpreters. He is even depicted as a character assisted by the Holy Spirit (6:3, 7:1, 8:24, 11:16). Divine assistance is crucial to his role, as, in 11:39-40, he is portrayed as the one responsible for the exegesis of the visionary content within the context of the prophecies in scripture. Although in the 'E' and 'C' versions, the 'S' and 'L²' versions illustrate Hezekiah's interpretative role. Observe this occurrence in the versions below:

11:36–40

'E': ³⁶ These things I saw. And said Isaiah to all who came before him, and who hearing these wonderful things sang hymns. And he spoke to king Hezekiah, and said, "These things as I have spoken, ³⁷ and the end of this world, ³⁸ and all this vision will be fulfilled in the last generation." ³⁹ And Isaiah made him swear that he would not speak to the people of Israel, nor would he give these words to transcribe them to a multitude, [...]. ⁴⁰ And then they shall read them

'C^{akh'}: ³⁶ These things indeed] I saw. [And these wonderful things Is]aiah said [to those who stood and] listened, [and praised. Isaiah then said to] Hezekiah the king, [saying to him:] These things all [that I have told you,] ³⁷ and the end of this [aeon ³⁸ and] all vision, [will be completed in the last ge]neration. ³⁹ Isa[iah then made him swear that he would not tell them] to the peo[ple of Israel nor] would he say the words [to any

'S': ³⁶ This I saw, Isaiah said to those who stood around him and who, hearing these wonderful things, celebrated and sang hymns to God that such grace gives to human beings. And he said to king Hezekiah: ³⁷ "The consummation of this century ³⁸ and all this vision will become real in the last race." ³⁹ And he begged them not to announce to the children of Israel nor to give these words to any man to be transcribed. ⁴⁰ "But how much

'L²': ³⁶ These things, while he saw them, Isaiah said them to those who were around him, and when they heard these wonderful things they all sang and glorified the Lord who gave so grace to men. And he said to king Hezekiah, ³⁷ "The consummation of this century, ³⁸ and his (his) works will be accomplished in the last generations." ³⁹ And he forbade them not to announce to the people of Israel and not to give these words to any man

(ወአሜሃ ያኑብብምን – <i>wa'amehā</i> <i>yānabəbəməna</i>).	man, to write] them, ⁴⁰ if not ...] parables ...] (ειμη [τι . . .]η ἡπαρά [βολη . . .] – <i>aimē</i> [ti . . .]n <i>npara</i> [bolē. . .]).	<u>from the king you will</u> <u>understand of the</u> <u>things spoken in the</u> <u>prophets, such things</u> <u>you understand”</u> (Нѣ ѣлико аще разоумѣете от аще разоумѣете от цѣсаря реценана въ пророцѣхъ, таковаа разумѣите – <i>Nŭ jeliko ašte</i> <i>razumějete ot cěsarę</i> <i>rečecenaja vŭ</i> <i>prorocěkhŭ, takovaja</i> <i>razuměite</i>).	to be written. “But how many things said in the prophets that the king will understand, ⁴⁰ so much will you understand.” (<i>Sed</i> <i>quanta intelligentur</i> <i>a rege [et] dicta in</i> <i>prophetis, talia</i> <i>intelligetis</i>)
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‘Leg’ 2:5: And when this was done, the great Isaiah called his son Josab and the scribe Samnas and king Hezekiah and all bystanders, those who were worthy to hear what the great prophet Isaiah had seen (Καὶ τούτου γενομένου ἐκάλεσεν ὁ μέγας Ἡσαΐας Ἰασοῦμ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ Σωμνὰν τὸν γραμματέα καὶ Ἑζεκίαν τὸν βασιλέα καὶ πάντας τοὺς περιστῶτας, οἵτινες καὶ ἦσαν ἄξιοι τοῦ ἀκοῦσαι ἅπερ εἶδεν ὁ ἅγιος Ἡσαΐας ὁ προφήτης).

The passage 11:39–40, particularly the statement "how much from the king you will understand of the things spoken in the prophets, such things you understand," from the ‘S’ version, alongside King Hezekiah's role in Ascls Part One, suggests a significant interpretative process undertaken by someone closely linked to the prophetic group and skilled in hermeneutics regarding the testimonies and traditions concerning Jesus. He is not alone in this task but is surrounded by three court figures, “Samnas the secretary, Jehoiakim, and Asaph the historian” (6:17), whom the Holy Spirit guides in their interpretative process: “(...) for they were doers of righteousness, and the fragrance of the Spirit was in them.” (6:17). This underscores the reverence and importance of interpreting prophecies and tasks related to writing and editing, a responsibility shared by a group of individuals working under a leader: “And then they shall read them” (ወአሜሃ ያኑብብምን – *wa'amehā yānabəbəməna*) (11:40). A group of

specialists developed such an interpretation of prophecies and tasks related to writing and editing. They may have been part of the exegetes, a subgroup within the group of interpreters, responsible for producing narratives in close cooperation with the prophetic circle. The exegetes are particularly skilled in interpreting and explaining the meaning of the prophecies. They also participate in public performances such as worship and liturgical celebrations, as the writing depicts them as fellows sitting next to the prophets, and they are assisted by the Holy Spirit (6:17).

The role of Hezekiah and the group of interpreters becomes clearer in Ascls Part Two. The very beginning of Ascls 1 presents a solemn scene in the king's palace. However, this image does not depict a prophetic ritual but rather a family tragedy. Hezekiah, the father and supreme prophet, entrusts his son, Manasseh, with the custodianship of both his own and others' prophetic inheritance. Other protagonists include Isaiah, who reveals Manasseh's impending infidelity, and Josab, a silent witness to his father's work. Hezekiah summoned Manasseh "to transmit to him (ከመ ያወፋየ – *kāmā yawāfayo*) the words of truth, which the king himself had seen" (1:2), "And the words of faith in the Beloved, which he himself had seen" (1:4). "And he (Hezekiah) transmitted to him (Manasseh) the written words which Samnas the secretary had written out, and also those which Isaiah the son of Amoz had given to him, and to the prophets (...)." (1:5).

The author of the above passages underscores the unique role of Hezekiah in transmitting visions. He relayed to Manasseh the account of his vision, which was written by the scribe Shebna, as well as that of Isaiah's vision, likely conveyed to Shebna and the prophets for documentation and deposition with the king. The emphasis here lies not only on the content of Hezekiah's vision, which has prompted

various hypotheses,³³³ but also on his duty in relaying the written version of Isaiah's vision. This responsibility was not assigned to the prophets. The above passages, together with sections 11:36–40, indicate that the roles of interpreting and transmitting Isaiah's vision and of interpreting prophecies were ascribed to King Hezekiah and a group of interpreters. These roles set them apart from the prophets and illuminate their distinctive function in prophetic ceremonies. Simultaneously, the exegesis conducted by interpreters is guided by the Holy Spirit, while the prophecies and visions uttered by prophets are inspired and carried out through the Holy Spirit. Questions concerning the purpose of the interpretations intersect with inquiries about the methods employed in the interpretative practices.

Surprisingly, the early believers in Jesus from the Ascension of Isaiah do not seem focused on defending the divinity and authority of the Beloved in their scriptural exegesis. They also appear to ignore his future coming; or, at least, it does not seem to be their main concern. Instead, they concentrate on maintaining their prophetic authority, which opposes the more routinised structures of power imposed by "wicked elders" (3:21). The crux of the dispute over authority likely hinges on determining which prophetic circles are granted a complete revelation of heaven.³³⁴ Consequently, as most scholars argue, the purpose of their exegesis is to influence the behaviour of

³³³ For hypotheses regarding the vision of Hezekiah, see Eugène Tisserant, *Ascension d'Isaïe. Traduction de la version éthiopienne avec les principales variantes des versions grecque, latines et slave, introduction et notes. Documents pour l'étude de la Bible* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1909), 86;" André Caquot, "Bref commentaire du 'Martyre d'Isaïe'", in *Semitica* 23 (1973), 69-70; Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 76–82.

³³⁴ Hall, "The Ascension of Isaiah", 297.

the audience. The audience faces a conflict between a prophetic *élite*³³⁵ and office holders, or a disagreement and tension between prophets and other prophets.

The author of the entire composition of the Ascension of Isaiah was certainly a theologically creative exegete of Isaiah. He was also confident that the readers were prepared to decipher and interpret his innovative cosmological reading of the story of Jesus. The significant ability of readers and listeners to interpret the meaning of the apocalyptic narratives can be better appreciated when we acknowledge that the author conveyed meaning not solely through what the text states. Robert Hall proposes that the writer, through the narratives, was opening windows for the readers and interpreters to reach the meaning that lies beyond the text.³³⁶ According to Hall, every act of reading is a performance, during which interpreters actively mine oracles to discern their meanings through the revelatory words. In this sense, revelatory words are akin to windows through which readers and listeners gaze and, by applying their mastery of scripture, uncover a plethora of perspectives on the meanings beyond the text. Hall's thesis evokes Rowland's findings on the meditative practices of ancient Jews. These practices consist of recalling memorised scriptural texts, envisioning them, and conceiving them afresh. Such visualisation, achieved through what has been read (or heard), often involves the creation of mental images.³³⁷ Drawing on relevance

³³⁵ For a small group of prophets referred to as the audience of the Ascension of Isaiah, see Pesce, "Presupposti per l'utilizzazione storica", 13–76; Destro and Pesce, *From Jesus to his First Followers*, 100–102. For an analysis of the audience addressed by early Christian apocalyptic writings, including the Ascension of Isaiah, see Greg Carey, "Early Christian Apocalyptic Rhetoric," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 216–234.

³³⁶ Robert Hall, "Subtleties of Translation and Ancient Interpretation: Cues for Understanding the Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 145–174.

³³⁷ Christopher Rowland with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, "Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity," in *Paradise Now. Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April D. DeConick (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006), 41–56, here 50–51.

theory, Arcari understands the circulation process of two visionary manuscripts of the Shepherd of Hermas as a cognitive mechanism for constructing meaning and functioning of memory. This process, referred to by scholars as interpretation, entails a pragmatic search in memory to identify a relevant space for new information within the pre-existing database, rather than simply uncovering a meaning. Such interpretation comprises two elements: a shift of attention (focalisation) and a search in memory (evocation). During focalisation, attention shifts from the new information to incomplete conceptions. In evocation, the new information is examined and compared to information in one's long-term memory. This evocation replaces the term "meaning". The interpretive mechanism creates its own pathways in memory, and this process can become interminable. Therefore, while listeners and readers engage with the visionary text, this mechanism continually generates meanings, even at the level of words, without duplicating thoughts.³³⁸

In light of these findings, it is plausible to assume that the author of the narratives in the Ascension of Isaiah intended to engender in the readers and listeners a reflection on the redemptive mission of the Beloved. This could have occurred through a meditative process that recalls prophetic Jewish scriptural passages aimed at compelling a performative reading of the text. It involved recognising revelatory words intended for application and contemplation within scripture. However, it is also plausible to suggest that the author might have aimed to arouse more than just theological reflection. The believers, aside from reaching a plethora of views on revelatory meanings and mental images through meditative practice, one might argue,

³³⁸ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 29–146; Arcari, "P.Oxy. 1.5 and the *Codex Sangermanensis*", 472–473.

may have also undergone a visionary experience of the divine realms. The interpretation of scripture was as vital to the community of prophets as experiencing ascension to the seventh heaven. The author may have inspired confidence in the prophets' authority ascending to the heavens and their visionary and interpretative experiences through meditation practices and ascension to the divine realms.

To relaunch Isaiah's visionary account, the author does not emphasise the roles and significance of the members of his community. Prophets and interpreters are part of the Community of the Beloved. Among the figures seen in Ascls Part Two, the central role is held by Isaiah, surrounded by the prophetic group in the palace of Hezekiah. Although Isaiah is also with prophets in Ascls Part One, it is noteworthy that the author articulates the existence of "many believers" (𐤀𐤏𐤕𐤓𐤕 – *bəzūḥānə* / πολλοὶ) (2:9), "many who believe in him" (3:19), and "numerous believers and saints" (4:13).³³⁹ These *many* and *numerous* believers and saints are engaged in continuing the prophetic visionary cult in earth and heaven, which gave rise to the visionary experience in Ascls Part One, as observed in Chapters Three and Four: "who believed in the ascension to heaven" (2:9), "they will speak in the Holy Spirit" (3:19), "when they saw him in whom they hoped, him who was crucified, Jesus the Lord Christ – after I, Isaiah, I saw him" (4:13). They also embody those who "believe" in the normative line presented through the vision of Isaiah, i.e., in the cross and resurrection/ascension of the Beloved (3:18–20). It is also remarkable that, in 2:9–11, many of the believers are the prophets reported to be immersed in long-lasting ascetic practices of fasting: "They had nothing to eat" (2:11), mourning: "They all wept a great mourning" (2:11), and

³³⁹ Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 261–262. In Norelli's view, *servants* are those who are connected to the prophetic environment.

“were dressed in sackcloth” (2:10). Finally, the sentence, “When the numerous believers and saints saw the one in whom they hoped, the one who was crucified” (4:13) draws our attention. The author emphasises that the Beloved was seen by many after the vision of Isaiah.

The observations regarding the Community of the Beloved members and their visionary and interpretative experiences raise questions about their engagement with the continuity of religious practices from Ascls Part One, as the author highlights in his endeavour to relaunch the visionary account of Isaiah.

5.2 “Many who saw” – The Beloved Seen by the Believers and Saints

A significant section of Ascls Part Two, 3:13–4:22, also known as A New Vision of Isaiah, comprises the narrative material that we are focusing on. This narrative material addresses the vital problems faced by the author, who approaches them from the perspective of Ascls Part One. The core of the section critiques the corruption of pastors and presbyters in the Church, which is seen as a sign of the end times (3:21–31). This is followed by a description of the times dominated by the Antichrist (4:2–13). Preceding this diptych is the story of the Beloved in this world and the flowering of the Apostolic Church (3:13–20), and the section concludes with the epilogue that depicts the fate of the righteous and wicked as a consequence of the final messianic intervention (4:14–22).

Two passages in this section demand our attention. The first, 3:18–20, is a crucial part of the section where the author staunchly defends Ascls Part One against attacks by the ecclesiastical authorities. The author’s defence, articulated through the

powerful sentences “they will speak in the Holy Spirit” (19) and “many signs and wonders will take place” (20), serves as a reassuring beacon of the visionary account of Isaiah. After narrating the story of the Beloved (3:13–17), the author skillfully connects the contemporary situation of his community, i.e., “those who believe” (አሚኖተ – *’aminotə / πίστις*) in the “cross” (በመስቀሉ – *bamasəqalu / τῷ σταυρῷ*) and the “resurrection (ወበትንሣኤህ – *wabatənəśa’ehu*)³⁴⁰ / ascension (ጥገ ለናጸጸላይ) (18), with the teaching of the Twelve. The objects of their belief, i.e., the cross, the resurrection and the ascension of the Beloved, are reported in Isaiah’s vision (11:19–33) and form the pillars of the divine redemptive mission. Through the belief inherited from the teaching of the Twelve (cf. Mt 28:19), and not from the ecclesiastical authorities, the author’s community becomes the realm where the sessions of speaking in the Holy Spirit occur and the fertile ground for signs and wonders. Observe this passage below:

3:18–20

‘E’: ¹⁸ and they (twelve disciples) will instruct all peoples and every tongue concerning the resurrection of the Beloved, and indeed those who believe in his cross (ተአመኑ በመስቀሉ – *ta’amanu bamasəqalu*) will be saved, and in his resurrection to the seventh heaven (ወበትንሣኤህ ሳብዕ ስምዖ – *wabatənəśa’ehu sabə’ə saməyə*) whence he came; ¹⁹ and as there are many who believe in him (በዙጋን አለ ይትአመኑ – *bəzuḥānə ‘əla yəṯə’amanu*), they will speak in the Holy Spirit (በመንፈስ ቅዱስ ይትናገሩ – *bamanəfas qəddus yəṯənāggaru*), ²⁰ and many signs and wonders (ተአምር

‘G’ π[ν(εύματ)ι λαλήσουσ]ιν), ²⁰ and how many signs and wonders (ὡς πολλά σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) will take place in those days. [π. saved, and his ascension (καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει αὐ[τ]οῦ) to the seventh heaven, from whence he came; ¹⁹ and how many of the believers (καὶ ὡς π[ο]λ[λ]οὶ καὶ πολλοὶ [τ]ῶν [πιστε]υόντων) in him will speak in the Holy Spirit (ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ

³⁴⁰ Perrone, “Ascensione di Isaia Profeta. Versione etiopica”, 61, note 6 for 3:18. According to Perrone, the manuscripts E (EMML Pr. No. 1768, belonging to the Monastery of S. Stefano di Ḥayq) of the ‘E’ version adds “and in his ascension” (ወበዕርጉቱ – *waba*’).

ወመንከር – *ta'aməṛə wamanəkəṛə*) will take place in those days.

The objects of the belief, the cross, the resurrection and the ascension of the Beloved, are also registered in 4:13, the second passage from the section. This time, the number of believers is reduced as they flee to the desert. While this verse concludes the author's analysis of the times dominated by the Antichrist, it demonstrates his unwavering intention to defend the visionary account of Isaiah. In this conclusion, the author underscores the community of "believers and saints", as the centre of his eschatological interests despite the universal horizon of the previous verses. Observe this passage below:

4:13

'E': And numerous believers and saints (*ወብዙኃን መሃይምናን ወቅዱባን – wəbazuhana mahāyāmənānə waqədubānə*), when they saw (*ርእዩ – rə'əyu*) the One in whom they hoped (*ዘእመንቱ ይሌፈዉ – za'əmunətu yələfawu*), the One who was crucified (*ዘተሰቅለ – zataṣaqəla*), Jesus the Lord Christ (*ኢየሱስ እግዚእ ክርስቶስ – 'iyabusa 'əgəzi'ə kəṛəsətosə*) – after I, Isaiah, saw (*ድኅረ ርእከዎ ኣነ ኢሳይያስ – dəḥəre rə'ikəwo 'ana 'isayəyasə*) the One who was crucified (*ተሰቅለ – taṣaqəla*) and ascended (*ወዐርገ – wa'arəga*) –, and also who believed in him, of these few will be left in those days (as) his servants when they flee from desert to desert and await the arrival of the Beloved.

The author, while emphasising belief, claims that believers had a vision of the Beloved: "Numerous believers and saints saw (*ርእዩ – rə'əyu*) the One who was crucified (*ዘተሰቅለ – zataṣaqəla*)" (4:13). The mention of believers and saints having seen the Beloved is followed by the author's reference to Isaiah's vision, "after I, Isaiah, saw (*ርእከዎ – rə'ikəwo*)," underscoring the Beloved's crucifixion and ascension as the core elements of the visionary experience. The author affirms the correlation between the act of "seeing" experienced by believers and saints and the experience of "seeing"

encountered by Isaiah, with whom he aligns himself through the first-person pronoun.

Both acts of seeing share the same object: the Beloved crucified and ascended.

The author of verse 4:13 presents the vision of the saints and believers “after (ድኅረ – *dəḥəre*)” Isaiah’s vision, that is, relying on his own visionary experience, as indicated by the statement “I, Isaiah, saw”, with which he identifies. He does not specify how he, or the saints and believers, encounter the divine. However, in 3:20, he connects the belief inherited through the teaching of the Twelve with the practice of speaking in the Holy Spirit (19) and the signs and wonders occurring in his community. The addressees of these passages, embedded in the section aiming to strengthen their commitment to the visionary account of Isaiah, associate speaking in the Holy Spirit and signs and wonders with the sign of “the door which he opened” and “the voice of the Spirit heard” (6:6, cf. 6:9). The signs of “open door” and “the voice of the Spirit” are perceived in the visionary account of Isaiah as elements that initiate Isaiah’s ascent. Therefore, the author’s statement, “I, Isaiah, saw” and “they saw the One” (4:13), in the context of his earlier strong affirmation regarding signs and speaking in the Holy Spirit (3:20), suggests that his experience and the experiences of seeing the Lord within his community are connected to the prophetic ritual from *Ascls* Part One. This raises questions about the author’s religious experience, conveyed through first-person speech, as well as the experiences of the believers and saints.

One possibility is that, through their practices of reading the narratives of the visionary account, interpreters envisioned a meeting with “the One.” According to Harkins, fragmentary details from visionary accounts are re-actualised, extended, and

identifiable in new visionary texts through immersive readings.³⁴¹ In light of this idea, the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, designated by the author of 3:18-20 and 4:13 as the pillars of the belief of "numerous believers and saints", represent the re-actualisation achieved through the immersive reading of Isaiah's vision of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord through the seven heavens (11:19–33). It is a vivid narrative in which Isaiah observes (*ርእኩሁል* – *rə'ikəwo*) how the "adversary" crucified (*ወይሰቅለሁል* – *wayesaqəlaləwo*) (19–20) the Lord, "how after the third day he rose (*ይነሰኝ* – *yetənaśə'a*) and remained many days (21); "he sent out twelve disciples and ascended (*ወደረገ* - *wa'arəga*) to the firmament" (23). Subsequently, he "ascended" (*ወደረገ* - *wa'arəga*) consecutively to the higher heavens and received praises from the angels in each of these celestial realms (34–31). After ascending to the seventh heaven, he sat at the right hand of the Great Glory (32), and the Holy Spirit (*ዘመንፈስ ቅዱስ* – *zabamanəfas qəddus*).

The vivid language and dynamic account of the crucifixion, descent to Sheol, resurrection, and ascension to the consecutive seven heavens; open-ended questions from the heavenly beings (24, 26) and their emotional journey oscillating between sorrow (24) and religious euphoria expressed in intensifying worship and praise (26, 27, 30, 31), serve as a powerful means conveyed through first-person speech to re-experience the visionary encounter for its readers and listeners. This immersive reading remains coupled with the literary tradition of "all peoples and every tongue" taught by the Twelve, who "were sent" by the Lord before his ascension (22). Consequently, the

³⁴¹ Harkins, "Experiencing the Shepherd of Hermas," 131. For ritual meditation on visionary reports, see Christopher Rowland with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, "Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity," in *Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April D. DeConick (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006), 41–56.

three remarkable actions of the redemptive mission from Ascls Part One are now seen as the unchanging foundation, reinforcing the sense of belonging in a community facing a deteriorating situation.

Another possibility is that the “numerous believers and saints” were prophets who, adhering to the ritual patterns outlined in the visionary account in Ascls Part One, were confidently led to the encounter with the Beloved. The inheritors of the revelatory content engaged with the inspiring narratives immersively and followed prophetic patterns of the liturgical ceremony from the visionary account to “see the One.”

Ascls Part Two reveals further examples of the new meanings of passages from Ascls Part One achieved through immersive and performative reading.

5.3 “Many turned away and wept” – Ritual Mourning

In our pursuit to understand how the ancient Christians behind Ascls Part Two read the narratives from Ascls Part One, re-actualised them, and conceived them afresh, we focus on verses 2:9–11. They are part of a more extensive section: 2:1–3:12 and 5:1–14. In the traditional narrative model, a false prophet incites an evil king to persecute a true prophet, leading to a continuous clash between true and false prophecies. The protagonists of 2:7–11 are Isaiah and other prophets. They retreat from Jerusalem to the desert. The central motif is the removal of prophecy.

This passage captures our attention because the author lists the prophets and believers who find themselves in a state of reclusion: “Micah, the prophet, Ananias the elder, Joel, Habakkuk, Josab his son, and many believers (ወብዙኅን እለ የእምኑ –

wabəzuhenə 'əla ya 'mānu) who believed in the ascension into heaven, turned away and established themselves on the mountain (ደበረ – *dabara*; ሐቕል – *haql* / ὄρος) (2:9). This listing mirrors the portrayal in Ascls Part One, particularly verse 6:7, where prophets and devotees gather in the preparatory stage of the prophetic ritual: “The king convoked all the prophets, and all the people that congregated there, and Micah, and the aged Ananias, and Josab were sitting on his [Isaiah] right” (6:7) (cf. §4.2.2). Observe this parallel in the pericope below:

2:9–11

‘E’: ⁹ And Micah the prophet, Ananias the elder, Joel, Habakkuk, Josab his son, and many believers (*ወብዙኅን እለ የአምኑ – wabəzuhenə 'əla ya 'mānu*) who believed (*መሃይምናን – mahāyəmənanənə*) in the ascension into heaven (*ዕርገተ ሰማይ – 'əragata samayə*) turned away (*ተግሐሥ – tagəhəsə*) and established themselves on the mountain. ¹⁰ All were dressed in sackcloth (*ከሉሙ ሠቀ ይትዓፀፉ – k'wəlomū šaqa yəṯə 'adafu*) and all were prophets, who had nothing with them, but were naked; and they all wept (*ወከሉሙ ይላኩሉ – wak'wəlomū yəḷāhəwu*) a great mourning (*ላሐ ዐቢየ – lāḥa 'abiya*) over the error of Israel. ¹¹ And these had nothing to eat (*አልቦሙ ዘይበለዑ – 'aləbomū zayəbalə 'u*), except that they gathered desert herbs (*ሐምለ – ḥaməla*) from the mountains (*እምኢድባር – 'əmə 'adəbarə*), and having cooked them, they ate them with the prophet Isaiah. And they dwelt in the mountains and on the hills for two years of days.

‘G’: ⁹ And Micah the prophet, and Ananias the aged, and Joel and Habakkuk and Isasouph his son and many of the faithful (*πολλοὶ τῶν πιστῶν*) who believed in the ascension into heaven (*εἰς οὐρανὸς ἀναβῆναι*) turned away (*ἀνεχώρεσαν*) and settled up on the mountain, ¹⁰ all dressed in sackcloth (*πάντε < ς > σάκκον περιβεβλημένοι*), and they were all prophets and had nothing with them, but they were naked, weeping with a great mourning (*πενθοῦντες πένθος μέγα*) for the transgression of Israel. ¹¹ And these ate nothing (*οὐκ ἔσθιον*), except plucking herbs (*βοτάνας τίλλοντες*) on the mountains (*τῶν ὀρέων*) and [...] living with Isaiah.

The pericope vividly describes the ascetic practices of ritual mourning. Scholars consider it unlikely that the fasting in this excerpt was a preparation for the prophets to achieve a visionary experience. The choice of unusual foods to abstain from, as well as the absence of a forty-day fast, are reasons why the pericope does not conform to the

fasting pattern required for an ascent to heaven.³⁴² Despite not serving as a prelude to a vision, the pericope 2:9–11 recalls a broader literary tradition in which the motif of ascent to heaven is embedded. It explicitly references lamentation, fasting, and weeping while donning sackcloth. These elements complement ascetic practices, appropriated for ritual mourning, which typically precede visions in early Jewish and Christian literary traditions.³⁴³ Fasting, penitence, and ascetic exercises that lead to total physical exhaustion, invoking weeping and mourning, serve within Jewish mystical and apocalyptic traditions as techniques to induce the mourner into an alternate state of consciousness.³⁴⁴ Such imagery evoked by the passage 2:9–11 would have been very familiar to readers who engaged with the visionary account of Isaiah.

Furthermore, the author vividly depicts the prophets' intense austerity and reclusion. He incorporates the narrative of the marginalised prophets, reclused with Isaiah in mountains and deserts (2:9–11), into a broader composition (2:1–3:12). This broader composition serves as a thematic unit that explores the persecution of the righteous. Another pivotal moment in this thematic line is the marginalisation and “fleeing” (ይጉደዩ – *yəgṣṣu*) “from desert to desert” (እምገዳም ውስተ ገዳም – *’əmāgadāmā wəsəta gadāmā*) of the Lord’s “servants” (አግብርቱ – *’agəbərətu*) (4:13). The reclusion,

³⁴² Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae (Commentarius)*, 132, note 1.

³⁴³ Cf. Dan 4:21; 4 Ezra 6:30, 36; 7:1; 2 Bar 6:2; 2 Bar 35:1–36:1; T. Levi 2:4–6; 2 En 1:2–8a; Jos. Asen. 14:1; Herm. Vis. III, 10:6.

³⁴⁴ Idel, *Kabbalah*, 88; Francis Flannery, “Ascents, Apocalypses, and Neuroscience: Moshe Idel and the Study of Religious Experience” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, 2009). For an analysis of the underlying context where ecstatic experiences appeared to accompany visions in Jewish texts from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, see Anders Hultgård, “Ecstasy and Vision,” in *Religious Ecstasy. Based on Papers read at the Symposium on Religious Ecstasy held at Åbo, Finland, 26th–28th of August 1981*, ed. Nils Holm (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1981), 218–225. Cf. also Vicente Dobroruka, “Chemically-induced visions in the Fourth Book of Ezra in light of comparative Persian material,” *JSQ* 13, no. 1 (2006): 1–25. For textual indicators like weeping and fasting, employed by the author of 4 Ezra to signify the various stages of Ezra’s vision, see Michael E. Stone, “Seeing and Understanding in 4 Ezra,” in *Revealed Wisdom. Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, ed. John Aston (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill 2014), 122–136.

austerity, marginalisation, and reduction in the number of prophets likely mirror the real experiences of the readers of the Ascension of Isaiah, who faced criticism from the presbyters and pastors of the Church.

In 2:9, the author acknowledges the prophetic assembly in the withdrawn, marginalised, and reduced-in-number prophets, as evidenced by the evoked names of the prophets sitting next to Isaiah. This recognition suggests that these marginalised prophets are summoned to partake in a ceremony akin to the one described in Ascls Part One. Notably, in this recognition, the author re-adapted the phrase from 6:7 by substituting “all the people” for “many believers” and adding “who believed (መሃይማኖት – *mahāyḗmānanā*)”. Their “belief in the ascension into heaven” is the prerequisite for engaging in the preparatory ascetic rituals, which induce weeping and mourning. This preparatory ascetic ritual triggers an alternate psychic state of the mourners.

The parallel elements in 2:9–11, along with the description of the prophetic ritual, including the names of the prophets and the preparatory activities of fasting, mourning, and weeping, indicate that an immersive interpretation of this pericope was undertaken. How were they produced? As Arcari postulates, during the process of interpretation, a visualisation of what has been read or heard is generated as a result of the cognitive mechanism involved in construing knowledge; thoughts are not duplicated but envisioned, conceived afresh and applied to the new reality.³⁴⁵ Therefore, in the case of the interpreted pericope, the image of the prophets and “many believers (...) who turned away and established themselves in the mountains” (2:9) results from the process of interpreting the image of the prophets “sitting on

³⁴⁵ Arcari, “P.Oxy. 1.5 and the *Codex Sangermanensis*”, 472.

Isaiah's right" (6:7), adapted to the new reality. "All the people" (6:7) is replaced by "many believers"; the prophets come to Jerusalem and celebrate their ceremony in a royal setting (6:1), whereas in 2:9, they withdraw from Jerusalem and are marginalised and in reclusion.

Amidst the visible adaptations, replacements, and re-actualisations in 2:9 resulting from interpretive practice, the pericope recalls the image of oneness with themselves: "They were all prophets" (ነቢያት ኩሎም – *nabiyāta kʷallomu*), and they all accepted the austerity and mourning: "All were dressed in sackcloth" (ኩሎም ሠቀ ይትግፀፉ – *kʷallomu šaqa yəṭə ‘aḏafu*), "They all wept" (ወኩሎም ይላሕዉ – *wakʷallomu yəḷāḥəwu*), "They all had nothing with them" (2:10). They embraced the state of *communitas*, as did the prophets in Ascls 6–11, coordinating their activities to experience oneness with the cosmos, as 2:9 states: "Who believed (መሃይምናን – *mahāyāmənənə*) in the ascension into heaven." The use of "all" (ኩሎም – *nabiyāta kʷallomu*) in 2:10 establishes a clear connection to "They all heard the door" (ወስምዑ ኩሎም ለኖኅት – *wasamə ‘u kʷallomu laḥohəṭə*) (6:6), "all heard (ስምዑ ኩልሎም – *samə ‘u kʷallomu*) the voice of the Holy Spirit" (6:8), and "they all worshipped" (ኩልሎም ሰጉዱ – *kʷallomu sagadu*) (6:8) from Ascls Part One. This connection arises from the immersive reading undertaken by interpreters. Readers and listeners recalled the vivid narratives describing the prophets undertaking the prophetic ritual, all hearing, and all worshipping to immerse themselves in the actions of the prophetic ritual, envision its episodes, and reach the experience of the divine with the prophets of Ascls Part One. This process of immersive reading also indicates how the author of 2:9–11 conceived afresh the concept of the state of oneness, which is not duplicated, as Arcari postulates, and applied it to the new reality. This concept of oneness enabled the

prophets to encounter the divine. The replacements and re-adaptations seen in the text stem from the immersive interpreting practices undertaken by the interpreter or group of interpreters of passages from the visionary account of Isaiah. During the interpretive process, they underwent a profound cognitive process of visionary experience. This process led them to shape new and re-actualised visionary experiences with meanings that directly addressed the reality of marginalisation and reclusion. The Ascls Part One, when listened to and read during the immersive interpreting process, proves to be a text that could activate in the community of the marginalised prophets a profound experience of oneness with themselves and the cosmos.

The primary function of pericope 2:9–11 within the larger composition 2:1–3:12 is to strengthen the conviction in the redemptive mission of the Beloved and to counter the attitude of “making ineffective” or “neglecting” (3:31) the prophetic vision by “wicked elders and shepherds” (3:24). The above analysis illuminates how the author of passage 2:9–11, deeply immersed in the interpretative practice regarding the passages from Ascls Part One, conceived a new and refreshed meaning and channelled new visionary experiences. The author’s inclusion of this meaning in the larger section 2:1–3:12 represents a passionate defence and relaunch of the visionary account of Isaiah in the context of a constant clash between true and false prophecies, and the Holy Spirit withdrawing from the majority of Christians (3:26).

Conclusion

This Chapter examines manifestations of religious experiences in Ascls Part Two, a continuation of the material from Ascls Part One. After addressing aspects related to transmission, interpretation, and the roles and functions of interpreters and prophets, we analyse passages from Ascls Part Two that display similarities to the narratives from Ascls Part One. This scrutiny reveals signs in Ascls Part Two of repetitive and performative religious practices of ascension to heaven by its author and members of his community. Passages 2:9–11, 3:19, and 4:13 indicate that the prophets and interpreters re-experienced the encounter with the divine from Ascls 6–11 and re-actualised its meaning for the new reality.

The surprising confession of the author of Ascls Part Two to have seen the Lord (4:13) demonstrates signs resulting from the interpretation of the narrative 11:19–33, which culminated in a religious experience with the divine. The vivid and emotional language, which traverses sorrow, surprise, happiness, and open-ended questions, coupled with depictions of intense worship, can create religious euphoria. This suggests that the narrative was designed by the author of Ascls Part One to be experienced through immersive reading and listening. This immersive experience is intended to re-enact and re-actualise the visionary experience of Isaiah, taking the reader on an emotional journey. The re-actualisation of the elements of belief in 3:19 and 4:13, as announced in 11:19–33, indicates that the interpreter has conceived a new and refreshed meaning of the belief.

The pericope 2:9–11 exhibits signs of being the result of an immersive interpretation of passages in Ascls 6, which vividly describes prophets engaged in the prophetic ritual. The author of Ascis Part Two, with expert precision, evokes through repeated “all” the oneness of the prophets participating in the actions of the preparatory stage of the prophetic ritual, unveiling the dynamic and engaging transformation of the prophets to become *communitas*, akin to the prophets’ ceremony in 6:1–12. This phenomenon, along with readaptations and substitutions of certain terms, indicates that interpreters, through immersive reading, re-enacted the religious experience of Isaiah in *communitas*, as described in Ascls 6.

Both readings demonstrate that the visionary narratives from Ascls Part One were read, enacted, and re-experienced by the author and his community in Ascls Part Two. Their immersive reading inspired religious experiences of encountering the divine, similar to those described in Ascls Part One. While experiencing the divine, they conceived new and re-actualised meanings for their reality of marginalisation and reclusion.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

The starting point for this thesis is the Ascension of Isaiah 6:10–12, a text that is often considered one of the best accounts of ecstasy in ancient Jewish and Christian literature. This ecstatic phenomenon, occurring within a collective prophetic liturgy, has led some scholars to think that the text may refer to the performances of the prophets themselves. However, the theories regarding the religious experiences of the prophetic guild have not been addressed.

Before highlighting the contributions and values of this work, I must admit that investigating, learning about, and enjoying the ancient peoples' most profound expressions of belief and their religious encounters with the divine is a rewarding and enriching experience for me. Perhaps the most valuable and challenging task is to maintain a consistent focus on the issue of the ancient peoples' religious experiences, rather than solely concentrating on the literary, social-historical subjects or even cognitive topics that can be examined in the Ascension of Isaiah, which is also very intriguing. For a researcher trained to delve into ancient texts and gather meticulous details from ancient languages, focusing on the somewhat nebulous category of religious experience has become a new learning opportunity.

Developing a method to explore something as complex and multifaceted as the religious experiences of people in antiquity necessitates identifying diverse theories

from the humanities and the methodologies employed by scholars studying the phenomena of religious experiences in ancient literature. There is neither a unique method nor a singular theory that allows us to approach the religious experiences of an individual or group situated within a particular socio-cultural context of time, namely the Ascension of Isaiah. Nevertheless, I hope to have demonstrated that applying a multidisciplinary approach to religious experience, coupled with the methodologies employed by scholars who have leveraged tools provided by the humanities, is a valid means of contributing to a deeper understanding of early Christian communities.

This study demonstrates signs in the text indicating how the ancient people's religious experience stimulated the early Jews and Christians behind the Ascension of Isaiah to encounter the divine in various stages of this writing. The religious experience of these individuals is, in several ways, lying behind and described by the text, designed to be induced by the text and, finally, induced by the text and re-actualised as another generation of the text. The religious experience stands in the background of the apocalypse.

This research does not establish accurate boundaries between the imaginative and literary elements and the genuine reports of the visionary experience used by the authors. It uncovers how, in Ascls Part One, the prophets achieve a profound unity with themselves and the heavenly beings, *communitas*, through their performance of the prophetic-liturgical ritual. The approach of the narratives of the visionary account in Ascls Part One also unveils sections that hold the power to construct an imaginal body for the readers and listeners of the narratives, thereby profoundly impacting their engagement with the text. The examination of Ascls 8–9 reveals how the narratives have the potential to initiate a personal transformation for their readers and listeners,

allowing them to re-experience Isaiah's encounter with the divine. The analysis of narratives in Ascls Part Two discloses sections that are re-actualisations of the narratives from Ascls Part One. The study demonstrates how interpreters, through immersive reading, re-enacted the experiences of meeting the divine in the narratives of Ascls Part One and conceived new and refreshed meanings.

The religious experience in the Ascension of Isaiah, as visualised here, nurtures and raises questions about the conceivable relationship between the liturgical-prophetic rituals of the seers, who self-identify with Isaiah, and mystical praxis in the communities of the early Christian movement. The worship of the risen Jesus, as seen in early Christian literature, suggests that individuals and communities in the past might have built their convictions on experiences of the divine. While bound to conversion and shaped by their visionary counterparts in Jewish circles, such *experientia* was likely founded on the union with the figure of the Lord Jesus or Christ Jesus. The encounter with the divine, resulting from visionary and revelatory traditions that were re-enacted and re-actualised in cognitive processes of interpretation and immersive reading, may have engendered further experiences among the early Christians who wished to hear the door being opened and to praise in unison with the angels and the righteous. A methodologically interdisciplinary sourced approach to the pathways and development of the praxis of experiencing the divine in early Christian communities might allow us to understand them from the perspective of their experiences of the divine.

The religious experiences of individuals and communities depicted in the Ascension of Isaiah, as examined in this study, are intrinsically connected to the world's oldest complex of religious phenomena, identified today as shamanism. The presence

of a charismatic intermediary with the divine, someone willing to enter a visionary state and visit realms beyond the human or terrestrial experience, constitutes a universal phenomenon that transcends cultures and eras. The extent to which the experiences observed in this ancient text accompany or arise from the development of shamanic trajectories presents an intriguing perspective and has the potential to ignite discussions on future research avenues.

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