

Statement of Purpose

Prefaced as an incantation to be recited at any time in the name of YHWH, the magical liturgy text 11Q11 provides ritual instructions to defend against demonic attack. 11Q11 V 5-8 records, “[When] he comes upon you in the nig[ht], you shall [s]ay to him: Who are you, [oh offspring of] man and of the seed of the ho[ly] ones? Your face is a face of [delus]ion, and your horns are horns of illu[si]on. You are darkness and not light, [injus]tice and not justice.” Although its heavily fragmented material state obscures the specific demonology of the composition, columns of 11Q11 clearly envision a figured world populated by powerful, supernatural Others who had the potential to disrupt quotidian social and ritual life. Further, the language of the composition generates a textual landscape with delineated spatial and temporal parameters that ground both supernatural and human actors within a shared space-time world.

The reign of the demonic while postured as temporary remained contemporary to the lived reality of the Qumran community/communities. Careful linguistic attention to both the qualitative temporalities and the spatial arenas associated with demonic activity, might yield valuable insights as to the value hierarchies and identities constructed within the community. In my doctoral research, I wish to examine how authorial ontology both engenders and is manifest in the spatial-temporal dimensions of the magical texts of the Qumran corpus. Here, authorial ontology refers to the interrelation between the voice of the text and the lived experiences and ideological proclivities of the communities that generated it. How do ontological descriptions of the preternatural reveal and delimit the epistemic realm of possibility imagined by the community? How does evil serve as an organizing principle for the dimensions of the sectarian universe? Further, how are the magical texts related to and perhaps informed by the sectarian documentary texts of the corpus? My sense is that sectarian reifications of the demonic are revealing of the community’s lived experiences and anxieties. The magical text provides a linguistic arena with which to identify, describe and neutralize perceived threats through ritual means. It is through the medium of language that the quotidian reality of the sectarian member extends to subsume a dynamic space-time realm comprising eschatological time, supernatural agents and otherworldly realms. As worlds collide and temporalities ostensibly coalesce, the possibility of supernatural interference is realized and with it arises new potentialities for ritual action.

Previous scholarship’s accounts of the intersection of Jewish magical traditions at Qumran have been complicated by both the theological multiplicity characteristic of the Second Temple Period, as well as the fragmentary materiality of the primary-texts. Gideon Bohak has decried scholarship’s neglect of early Jewish magic and emphasized the pronounced need for further study. This project proposes to use Qumran as a microcosm to examine Jewish magical texts within the larger context of Second Temple Judaism. It would carefully consider the apotropaic and exorcistic texts of the corpus with a proposed focus on: 4Q510, 4Q511, 4Q444 and 11Q11. Employing literary- and text-critical methods, as well as social science and linguistic anthropological theory, the project would explore how the constitution of the figured world of the magical text is enabled and enacted by language. This is manifest in the language which relates the dimensions of the figured world and names its constituent parts but is also evident

throughout the Qumran corpus in the use of metapragmatic linguistic statements – that is talk about talk, those statements which indicate subjunctive, hypothetical, ritual, past or future speech or attribute a particular kind of orality to a speech act. Repeated references to speech acts throughout the Qumran magical texts purport the power of potent speech as an efficacious means of countering demonic affliction. Postured as both constitutive and transformative, language not only constructs the figured world of the magical text but also serves as a medium of agency within it.

An interesting direction for the project might consider how the sectarian community both constructs a particular stratified orientation of the universe, manifest in its division of time into periods, space into realms and actors into bifurcated lots, but also fervently desires its dissolution through the discursive device of the eschaton. How does eschatological language influence and furnish the contents of magical texts? Does their frequent intimation in the Qumran materials relay certain psychic anxieties experienced by their authors/compilers/redactors/readers? What parallels might be coextensively drawn between the Qumran texts and other magical materials from the wider cultural milieu of the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world?

My previous academic training in Religious Studies has prepared me with the necessary theoretical and methodological skillsets to undertake this project. My master's study at the University of Toronto, under the supervision of Judith Newman, focused on the application of social science theory to 11Q11 in order to provide a functionalist explanation for its ritual performance at Qumran. Over the course of this project, I gained extensive knowledge of both the literature of the field, as well as of current social science theory. Further, my reading knowledge of Biblical Hebrew, French and German, coupled with my increasing competence in Modern Hebrew and Koine Greek would facilitate my critical engagement with both primary texts and secondary sources. I am currently enrolled in Greek and Hebrew language courses, which I plan to continue throughout 2017 to further develop my language skills. For this reason, I also intend to attend an Ulpan in Israel during the summer of 2017.

The Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto would be an ideal place to pursue my doctoral studies, given its many resources and the strength of its program. The continued guidance of Judith Newman, coupled with the department's interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion, would strongly benefit the direction of my project and the continued development of its potential research trajectories. I am especially interested in the collaboration program and would like to work in concert with the Jewish Studies and Near Eastern Studies departments. The collaboration program would provide a unique opportunity for multidisciplinary engagement and would be instrumental in the acquisition of the diverse methodological skills necessary to complete my project. Thank you for your time and consideration, I eagerly await the department's decision.