Youthful Love Is Eternal: 
Eleazar birabbi Qallir, *The Groom’s Qedushta*

Eleazar birabbi Qallir (late sixth century, Galilee)

*The Groom’s Qedushta*

Unlike the other poems presented in this volume, this piyyut was composed not for Passover but for the Sabbath following a marriage, making it a kind of early Jewish epithalamium or wedding hymn.¹ This difference in context results in a different reading of the Song of Songs, one that is not exclusively allegorical but instead blends the celebration of human nuptials with the drama of God’s love for and redemption of Israel and the promised land. The newly wed couple, here wished wedded bliss and joy from each other, along with children, becomes symbolic of the people—their hopes and destiny—as a whole.

The fact that this poem was composed to celebrate a marriage has consequences for both its form and content. Unlike a weekly or even festival piyyut, this work does not embellish a passage from the lectionary; instead, verses from the book of Ruth (4:11–12) occupy the place where the Torah portion would be quoted, and Isa 61:10 appears in place of the haftarah. The thematic emphasis is, not surprisingly, on love and celebration. The optimism (and implicit sensuality) of the wedding is contagious as well as symbolic, and Qallir shuttles freely among the real newlyweds who stand before him, ancestral couples who are exemplars for the pair, and figurative understandings of marriage that enrich the idea of covenant between the people and their God, and the nation and its land. And thoughout it all, he offers an extended meditation not only on the Song of Songs but on the importance of “song” more generally.

¹ On this qedushta, see Laura Lieber, “The Piyyutim le-Hatan of Qallir and Amittai: Jewish Marriage Customs in Early Byzantium,” in *Talmuda de-Eretz Yisrael: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Ancient Palestine*, ed. Steven Fine (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 275–299. The translation is based on the Ma’agrim text; Fleischer’s edition (*Hebrew Liturgical Poetry*, 154–164) is also cited in the notes.
The Groom's Qedushta (Qallir, late sixth century, Galilee)

Blessed are You, O Lord our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, the great, mighty, and awesome God, God most high, creator of heaven and earth

Unit 1: Magen

1 Youthful love is eternal
2 With those who wed each other today, may You be joined forever
3 Joyfully may they rejoice in the chamber of their wedding crowns
4 May the Beloved intensify their happy joy!
5 Clothe them in a garment of splendor and praise
6 And then You will rejoice in the maiden’s wedding dance

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2 Acrostic from alef to lamed; the poet speaks to God about the couple. God functions as both a participant in the nuptials and the mesader hatanim, the officiant.

3 In Qallir’s period, the chuppah (here translated as “chamber”) would have been an actual chamber, similar to the modern yichud room, and not simply a canopy.

4 Killulam, lit., “their crowning in marriage,” but also with overtones of “completion, perfection.”