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Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 3

JEWISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY UNDER THE CHRISTIAN ROMAN EMPIRE

BY

RICHARD KALMIN and SETH SCHWARTZ (ED.)

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והסנה אינגן אכל

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

On March 12-14, 2000, scholars from the United States, Europe, and Israel gathered at the Jewish Theological Seminary for a conference entitled "Jewish Culture and Society Under Christian Rome," jointly sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Union Theological Seminary. The rationale for the conference remains that of the book. We thought that the time had come to begin to view the extensive cultural production of the Jews between 300 and 600 C.E.—which includes the vast majority of rabbinic literature, midrash, piyyut, almost all of the ancient synagogues discovered by archaeologists and the art used to decorate them—as properly late antique. This implies that late antique Jewish culture took shape in an environment which was predominantly (in the Roman empire) or partly (in the western Sasanian Empire) Christian. We asked participants to explore the ways in which Jewish or Christian cultural production of the period was shaped by its late antique environment and manifests an interest in appropriating or reacting to elements of that environment, the ways in which Jews and Christians shared in a common culture but grew increasingly interested in producing distinctively Jewish, or Christian, artifacts.

This volume focuses on the Jews of Palestine during the period of Palestine's most sustained and intensive contact with Christianity: from the unification of the Roman empire under the first Christian emperor, Constantine, in 324 C.E., until the Arab conquests of the seventh century C.E. Since Palestinian Jewry was linked in a variety of ways to Jewish communities in other lands, several of the essays broaden the focus to include discussions of the Roman and Persian diasporas. The foundations of Jewish-Christian interaction in the later Roman Empire were obviously laid in the early and high Empire, and the advent of Islam in Syria-Palestine in 640 C.E. hardly brought the process to a close, even in Palestine. In addition, it is often impossible to understand late antiquity without intimate knowledge of the history and literature of earlier centuries; several essays in this volume therefore contain extended discussions of the biblical period, second Temple Judaism, and earlier pagan Rome.

the past, no longer could it function to exclude others, as some had argued since the time of Ezra. Through the formal recognition of conversion the rabbis created a legal and ritual process whereby biological fact was to be understood as altered by legal fiction. By accepting the terms of the covenant that bound the nation together one could become a member of that nation even though one lacked the biological or genealogical component of identity shared by other members of the nation. And while one may quibble about the details, the degree of assimilation into the community afforded by halakhic conversion, while not accomplished all at once, was extreme.[95]

[95] For a discussion of the rabbis' continued efforts—sometimes in the teeth of priestly resistance—to reduce or eliminate the lasting effects of foreign origin see Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 164-192.

2

SLIPPING TOWARD SACRAMENT: JEWS, CHRISTIANS AND MARRIAGE*

Michael L. Satlow

As much as they may have delighted in the rhymes and playfulness of his language, most Jewish congregants in Late Antiquity would have been at a loss to understand the poetic Hebrew and dense allusions that characterize the liturgical works of the prolific liturgical poet (*payytan*) Eleazar Qallir (Qiliri).[1] Yet on at least one otherwise ordinary Shabbat in the Land of Israel, the worshippers knew what to expect: an epithalamium for a recently married couple. "Bound by affection," the poet begins, "may your joy increase, as you are wed today in love and gladness; be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God."[2] Qiliri successively exhorts the groom and bride to rejoice in each other and then, in the strophe, in God. He then abruptly changes his referent:

> I shall crown My dove with grace and kindness
> As once I did when I revealed Myself in the flame of consuming fire;
> For you have ravished My heart, My sister, My bride.

* I am particularly grateful to my colleagues David Brakke and Steven Weitzman for their careful readings of this paper and their suggestions. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

[1] About Eleazar Qallir we know extraordinarily little, except that he appeared to have flourished in the Land of Israel around the beginning of the seventh century. *Piyyutim* may well have been composed with an awareness of their audience, and thus have juxtaposed obvious allusions with more learned ones. See the anonymous entry in *EncJud* 10:713-15.

[2] This translation, and the ones that follow, are modified from those of T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 221-23. The original text is found in E. Fleisher, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 154-64 (with the cited section from 159-61) (Hebrew).

Alluding both to God's revelation at Sinai and to verses from Song of Songs, Qiliri has drawn an analogy between this imminent fleshly marriage and the relationship between God and Israel. After expanding on this analogy and then repeating the strophe, Qiliri exploits the ambiguity that he has created:

> Arise, my beloved, and be married in love,
> Give hymns and thanks to your King.
> Sing and make music in my bridal chamber,
> "Under the apple tree you have awakened me."

Is "my beloved" the bride or Israel? Whose "bridal chamber" is it? Qiliri deliberately blurs these lines, allowing the real and the metaphoric marriages to melt into each other.

Around 405, halfway across the Mediterranean, the Christian bishop Paulinus of Nola also wrote an epithalamium. Relatively untroubled by the heated debates on the place of marriage in Christianity, Paulinus unhesitatingly, and at length, begins to bless the couple: "Harmonious souls are being united in chaste love, a youth who is Christ's virgin, a maiden who is God's."[3] Invoking the story of Adam and Eve, he reminds the couple that, "With His own lips God made this union holy, by the divine hand He established the human couple."[4] He goes on to talk of the superiority of Christian marriage over the "profane displays" of pagan weddings, and then instructs each spouse as to how each should behave. Then, like Qiliri, Paulinus changes his referent:

> At a wedding such as this, it is fitting that Mary, the mother of the Lord, be present.
> For she gave birth to God, while preserving her virginity…
> By this great sacrament (*sacramentum*) the church was wed to Christ,
> And became at once both the spouse and sister of the Lord…
> She is sister and wife since she has intercourse in the heart, not in the body,
> For her husband is not man, but God…

[3] The translations for Paulinus of Nola are modified from D. G. Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Sources of Early Christian Thought; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 128-40. The Latin text can be found at *CSEL* 30:238-45. The quotation is from *Carmen* 25, line 1 (*CSEL* 30:238; Hunter 128).

[4] *Carmen* 25, lines 15-16 (*CSEL* 30:238; Hunter 129).

> As brother and sister, run together to meet Christ, your spouse,
> So that you may be one flesh in the eternal body.[5]

Paulinus has gone beyond simple spousal blessing and instruction, expressing an understanding of earthly marriage as something that points beyond itself. For Qiliri, marriage points toward or symbolizes God's marriage with Israel on Mt. Sinai; for Paulinus, it is a sign of Christ's love for the Church.

Eleazar Qallir and Paulinus shared an understanding of earthly marriage as an institution that points toward the transcendent.[6] Neither Jews nor Christians have yet arrived at the truly "sacramental" view of marriage that each community – in its own way – would develop in the Middle Ages.[7] For Augustine, Paulinus's contemporary, marriage was still a "sort-of sacrament" (*quoddam sacramentum*), a mystery that had some type of power beyond itself.[8] Yet at the same time, Eleazar Qallir and Paulinus reflect an attitude toward marriage that emerges only in Late Antiquity. From the second to seventh

[5] *Carmen* 25, lines 153-54 (*CSEL* 30:243; Hunter 135), 167-68 (*CSEL* 30:243; Hunter 136), 173-74 (*CSEL* 30:243; Hunter 136); 195-96 (*CSEL* 30:244; Hunter 137), translation modified slightly.

[6] J. Schirmann, "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology," *JQR* 44 (1953): 123-61 notes the formal similarities between the *piyyut* and contemporary church poetry and ascribes these similarities to Jewish influence.

[7] Traditionally, rabbinic marriage is not termed "sacramental." The rabbis, according to S. Baron, "neither elevated marriage to the position of a sacrament, a supernatural sanction of what otherwise could be an unforgivable sin, nor did they regard it as a mere contract in civil law" (*A Social and Religious History of the Jews* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1952-1976], 2:218). I. Gafni notes that rabbinic marriage, unlike Christian marriage, was not, "in and of itself, a sacred institution or a sanctifying one" ("The Institution of Marriage in Rabbinic Times," in *The Jewish Family* [ed. D. Kraemer; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], 14). Neither view gives full due to the meaning of "sacrament" and its function as understood in Late Antiquity. On Christian views of marriage in the Middle Ages, see G. Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (trans. E. Forster; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 25-81; C. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. 273-80. Jews in the Middle Ages were greatly influenced by Christian approaches to marriage. See Z. W. Falk, *Jewish Matrimonial Law in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); E. Cohen and E. Horowitz, "In Search of the Sacred: Jews, Christians, and Rituals of Marriage in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 20 (1990): 225-49.

[8] Augustine, *Bon conj.* XV (*CSEL* 41:209).

centuries there is a discernable shift, albeit one that is slow and erratic, in the way that Jews, Christians, and pagans understood marriage. By Eleazar Qallir's time we have come far indeed from Catallus's understanding of marriage, or even from that of the author of Tobit.

Almost five hundred years before Paulinus, Catullus wrote his own poem to a prospective bride and groom:

> O Hymenaeus Hymen, O Hymen Hymenaeus
> No pleasure can Venus take without thee, such as honest fame may approve; but can, if thou art willing. What god dare match himself with this god?
> No house without thee can give children, no parent rest on his offspring; but all is well if thou art willing. What god dare match himself with this god?
> A land that should want thy sanctities would not be able to produce guardians for its borders – but could, if thou wert willing. What god dare match himself with this god?[9]

Marriage is a licit outlet for sexual desire; it provides heirs and succor for one's old age; and it furnishes citizens to the state, who both worship the gods and defend the homeland. In these functions, marriage is a secular institution. Yet like all else in antiquity, Roman marriage could hardly be labeled "secular." Marriage was given by the gods, and anyone entering into one would be foolish not to acknowledge the gods' gift and to pray to them for the success of the marriage. In marriage, as in all else, mere humans asked the gods for their protection.[10]

Replace "gods" with "God" in the preceding paragraph and the same sentiment held true for the Jews during the Second Temple period. Contemporary Jewish writers in Greek shared these utterly conventional Greek and Roman views – and perhaps even rites – of marriage. Neither Philo nor Josephus date the origins of marriage to

[9] Catullus 61.61-75 (trans. LCL 78).

[10] On the religious nature of Roman marriages, see S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 21-24, 164, 169. Pagan religious rites at weddings clearly continue into the fourth century: one of the Councils of Laodicea instructed priests who attended pagan marriages to leave before the accompanying rites were performed (canon 54). See the text in *Acta et Symbola: Conciliorum Quae Saeculo Quarto Habita Sunt* (ed. E. J. Jonkers; Textus Minores XIX; Leiden: Brill, 1954), 95.

Adam and Eve: both seem to understand it as a purely human institution. At the same time, both assumed that spouses propitiated God when they married. Philo, for example, assumes that "...persons who take maidens in lawful matrimony...have celebrated the bridal sacrifices and feasts."[11] Josephus argues that a man should not marry a prostitute because God will not accept her marital sacrifice.[12] Jews, both authors suggest, supplicated their God for protection when they married, and did so in ways that appear to resemble Roman wedding rituals.

The most complete description of a Jewish marriage from the Second Temple period is found in Tobit. Prior to consummating his marriage with Sarah, Tobias burns some fish entrails to confuse the demons. Then, before going to bed together for the first (and hopefully not last) time, the couple joins in prayer:

> Blessed art thou, God of our fathers, and blessed is thy name for ever and ever; let the heavens bless thee, and all thy creation to all the ages. Thou madest Adam, and madest Eve his wife for a helper *and* a stay for him: of them both came the seed of men: and thou didst say, it is not good that the man should be alone; let us make him a helper like unto him. And now I take not this my sister for lust, but in truth: command that I and she may find mercy and grow old together. And they said together, Amen.[13]

Here is the first reference in Jewish literature that links the myth of Adam and Eve to a human wedding celebration; God has instituted and continues to sanction marriage. Although this passage uses Genesis 2-3 as its point of departure, the sentiments and desires expressed in this prayer are hardly different from those of Catullus: God, the creator of marriage, should bless and look over this present marriage.

For Jews in the Second Temple period, marriage was not a symbol, but a human institution given, like all else, by God and requiring His protection.[14] Jewish wedding rituals from this time are almost

[11] Philo, *Spec.* 3.80 (trans. Colson, *LCL* 7:525): καὶ γάμους θύσαντές τε καὶ ἑστιαθέντες.

[12] Josephus, *A.J.* 4.245.

[13] Tobit 8:5-8 (trans. Charles 1:223-24).

[14] I am omitting from this discussion Joseph and Aseneth. This wedding is clearly symbolic, although it is far from clear of what it symbolizes. Moreover, the

completely unknown; it is probable that there was no single or authoritative liturgy or set of rites.[15] Jewish wedding customs, in fact, most likely emulated those of their local non-Jewish neighbors, "Judaizing" these rites as necessary. According to Hecateus of Abdera, for example,

> As to marriage…[Moses] saw to it that their customs (*nomima*) should differ widely from those of other men. But later, when they became subject to foreign rule, as a result of their mingling with men of other nations (both under Persian rule and under that of the Macedonians who overthrew the Persians), many of their traditional practices were disturbed.[16]

Even in the fourth century B.C.E., a pagan writer looking at contemporary Jewish marital practices (or perhaps the marital state?) was struck by how similar they were to his own, and how different they are from his own understanding of what the Bible prescribes.[17]

Whereas during the Second Temple period Jews largely ignored the biblical metaphor comparing God's relationship with Israel to a marriage, early Christian writers resurrected it.[18] Paul talks of the believer as being "betrothed to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2; cf. 1 Cor. 6:15-

provenance of the book itself is murky. See M. L. Satlow, "The Metaphor of Marriage in Early Judaism," in *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaisms and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions* (ed. A. Brenner and J.W. van Henten; STAR 2; Leiden: Deo, 2000), 3-32, at 8-12.

[15] Some scholars have seen in Tobias's prayer a prototype of a single or authoritative marital blessing during the Second Temple period. See D. Flusser and S. Safrai, "'In the Image of the Form of His Likeness'" in *Isaac Leo Seeligmann Volume* (ed. Y. Zakowitz and A. Rofe; 3 vols.; Jerusalem: E. Rubenstein, 1983), 2:453-61 (Hebrew).

[16] Quoted in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40.3.8, cited from M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-1984), 1:29.

[17] The marriage documents from the Cave of Letters, too, are very similar to contemporary non-Jewish documents. See H. M. Cotton, "The Rabbis and the Documents," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (ed. M. Goodman; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 167-79; H. M. Cotton and A. Yardeni, *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts from Nahal Hever and Other Sites* (*DJD* XXVII; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 265-74.

[18] For a more complete discussion of the biblical use of the metaphor and the ways in which Jewish writers at this time ignored it, see Satlow, "Metaphor of Marriage."

17), and in a somewhat obscure use of the marital metaphor in Romans 7:1-4 states that the believer is married to Christ.[19] Several passages in the Gospels also develop the metaphor of Christ as the bridegroom.[20] The use of this metaphor comes to its fullest expression in the New Testament in Ephesians 5:25-32:

> Wives, be subject to your husbands as through the Lord; for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ is the head of the church. Christ is, indeed, the savior of that body; but just as the church is subject to Christ, so must women be subject to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it, to consecrate and cleanse it by water and word, so that he might present the church to himself all glorious, with no stain or wrinkle or anything of the sort, but holy and without blemish. In the same way men ought to love their wives, as they love their own bodies. In loving his wife a man loves himself. For no one ever hated his own body; on the contrary, he keeps it nourished and warm, and that is how Christ treats the church, because it is his body, of which we are living parts. "This is why" (in the words of scripture) "a man should leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." There is hidden here a great *mysterion*, which I take to refer to Christ and the church.

This pseudo-Pauline letter, dating from around 100 C.E., argues that contemporary marital behavior should be modeled on the divine marriage between Christ and the church.[21] At the same time, the author goes further than just applying the lessons of the supernatural marriage to human marital conduct. Marriage is itself a *mysterion*. In the context of this passage, the *mysterion* applies to Gen 2:24, a verse that while putatively about human marriage really hides the secret of the relationship between Christ and the church. But the passage also suggests that human marriage is the *mysterion*, a relationship in

[19] For a succinct summary of the interpretive problems of this passage, if not an entirely convincing solution, see J. D. Earnshaw, "Reconsidering Paul's Marriage Analogy in Romans 7.1-4," *NTS* 40 (1994): 68-88.

[20] Matt 22:1-14; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 14:16-24 parallels Matt 22:1-14, but the context is not a wedding. John 3:27-30 puts the comparison in the mouth of John the Baptist.

[21] Cf. Rev. 19:7: "Let us rejoice and shout for joy and pay homage to him, for the wedding day of the Lamb has come! His bride has made herself ready…"

which, in some unarticulated and mysterious way, earth and heaven meet.[22]

The early Christian use of a marital metaphor was to at least some degree a sign of the times. In the first few centuries of our era Greeks and Romans were increasingly using marriage as a metaphor. The Greek romance novels, for example, appear to use marriage to think through certain issues of the Greek city and the integrity of its aristocratic citizens.[23] By the Antonine period, portrayals of husband and wife holding hands, the *dextrarum iunctio*, was used in private and public iconography to represent the concord of civic society.[24] Greek and Jewish philosophers had traditionally used marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between the soul and wisdom. As late as the third century, for example, Porphyry is still using it in this way.[25] Once early Christians identified Jesus with wisdom or the *logos*, the use of a marital metaphor to describe the relationship between Jesus and the community or individual flowed naturally.

[22] Early Christians understood the relationship between earthly marriage and the marital metaphor in complex ways that have yet to be fully understood. Irenaeus, for example, describes one gnostic ceremony in which a man addressed a group of women: "I want to share with you from my Grace… it is necessary to marry the One. Receive, first of all, from me and by me Grace. Wait as a wife supports her spouse, so that you are as me, and I as you. Install in your nuptial chamber the seed [*semen*] of Light. Receive from me the Spouse and both give him a place in you, and you in Him" (*Adv. Haer.* 1.13.3 [*SC* 264:194]. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.27 [*Opera*, ed. G. Dindorf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869) 2:260]). Cf. the use of this metaphor in the (late?) Gospel of Philip, and R. M. Grant, "The Mysteries of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip," *VC* 15 (1961): 129-40. K. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 45-67 argues that the authors of the Apocryphal Acts used this metaphor to subvert traditional values.

[23] Cf. J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representations in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1994), 41-76; Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 20-44.

[24] Cf. L. Reekmans, "La 'dextrarum iunctio' dans l'iconographie romaine et paleochrétienne," *Bulletin de l'Institut historique Belge de Rome* 31 (1958): 22-95, esp. 22-59 on its use in Roman art; G. Davies, "The Significance of the Handshake Motif in Classical Funerary Art," *AJA* 89 (1985): 627-40, esp. 632-35, 638-39.

[25] Cf. Satlow, "Metaphor of Marriage" 7-8. Porphyry's recitation of a poem, "The Sacred Marriage," caused Plotinus to commend him as a *hierophantes*, an expounder of sacred things (*Plot.* 15).

While early Christians tended to Christianize local pagan wedding customs, a more distinctively Christian approach to marriage developed during the first few centuries of our era.[26] In the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch calls on Christians to marry in the presence of a bishop "so that the marriage is according to (*kata*) the Lord and not according to passion" – although the exhortation against passion could have come out of Tobit, the presence of a bishop is new.[27] Clement of Alexandria links Gen. 1:28 to Eph. 5:22-33, calling marriage holy and thus worthy of comparison to Christ and the Church.[28] He also apparently refers to a Christian wedding blessing.[29] His contemporary Tertullian offers a fuller description of how a Christian wedding should take place:

> How shall we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives his consent?[30]

Although scholars have doubted whether this passage is an accurate (or representative) description of Christian wedding practices, Kenneth Stevenson (following Henri Crouzel) has argued that "the words not only echo pagan practice but also refer to a specifically Christian

[26] *Ep. ad. Diognetam* 5:6: "They marry like all, procreating, but they do not abandon the children." Cf. K. Ritzer, *Le Mariage dans les Églises chrétiennes du Ier au XIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 81-123; K. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 13-32; J. E. Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's Marriage Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 54-73.

[27] Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. ad Polycarp* 5.2. Ignatius' general elevation of the authority of bishops – "do nothing without the bishop" he elsewhere says (*Philad.* 7) – tempers the significance of the passage. Cf. H. Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity: Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 2:284-85.

[28] Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* II.83.1 (*SC* 108:164-65); *Strom.* III.84.2 (ed. Dindorf 2:296).

[29] Ibid., *Paed.* III.63.1 (*SC* 158:128-29). There is some debate over whether this really does refer to a blessing. See the discussion in Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 15-16.

[30] Tertullian, *Ux.* 2.8.6 (*SC* 273:148-49), translation from Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 17.

marriage liturgy..."[31] Elsewhere, Tertullian links the supernatural to contemporary Christian weddings in his comment that angels dance at weddings.[32]

During the latter half of the second century and the early part of the third, the rabbis too were beginning to define the characteristics of Jewish marriage. Tannaitic sources mention, *en passant*, a variety of wedding customs: crowns (of salt, tar, roses, or myrtle) worn by the groom and by the bride (hers made of gold embroidered silk); a procession of the bride in a litter, with musical accompaniment; a bridal chamber; and a fertility ritual in which wine and oil, in caskets, would be paraded before the bride and groom.[33] These customs are not distinctive; all were found in contemporary pagan weddings. There were, however, two innovative developments during the tannaitic period. A few tannaitic sources begin to show interest in the metaphor that compares the relationship of God and Israel to a marriage. It is possible, for example, that a Jewish understanding of Song of Songs as a metaphor for the relationship of God and Israel began to emerge at this time.[34]

[31] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing* 17-19. Cf. H. Crouzel, "Deux textes de Tertullien concernant la procédure et les rites du mariage chrétien," *Bulletin de litterature ecclesiastique* (1973) 1: 3-13, esp. 7-12.

[32] *Cor.* 14.2 (ed. Marra 69), *Virg.* 11.4 (2) (*SC* 424:164-67).

[33] For a list of customs, see *m. Sotah* 9:14 (ed. Albeck 3:260), *t. Sotah* 15:8-9 (ed. Lieberman 3.2:241-43). The materials for the crowns are enumerated at *t. Sotah* 15:8. On the parading of oil and wine, see *t. Šabb.* 7:16 (ed. Lieberman 2:27-28). Cf. S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archaologie* (Leipzig: G. Fock, 1910-12), 2:37-42; S. Safrai, "Home and Family," in *The Jewish People in the First Century* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern: CRINT; Assen: van Gorcum, 1976), 752-60.

[34] Cf. D. Boyarin, "Two Introductions to the Midrash on the *Song of Songs*," *Tarbiz* 56 (1987): 479-500 (Hebrew), who shows that Song of Songs held no special or allegorical meaning for the tannaim. The earliest text known to me that can be said to develop Song of Songs into an erotic metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel is a homily attributed to R. Akiba on Exod. 15:2 in the *Mek. d'Rabbi Yishmael Beshallah* 3 (ed. Horowitz and Rabin 127, paralleled in the *Mek. d'Rashbi*, ed. Epstein 79). On this passage, see D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 109-14. The best pre-rabbinic evidence for an allegorical understanding of Song of Songs is a fragment from Qumran, the so-called "Marriage ritual", which uses terminology from Song of Songs (*4Q502,* Group I fragments). This text, however, does not demonstrate a metaphorical reading of Song of Songs. See the comments of M. Baillet in *DJD* VII, 81-105, and M. L. Satlow, "4Q502: A New Year Festival?" *DSD* 5 (1998): 57-68.

Tannaitic sources also attest to the custom of a marital blessing. The "grooms' blessing" appears several times in tannaitic sources.[35] The text of this blessing does not appear in tannaitic sources, no doubt because a "standardized" version did not exist. As the Christians (or at least Tertullian) replaced the pagan marital sacrifice with liturgy and the eucharist, so too the rabbis may have replaced Jewish wedding sacrifices (if the testimony of Philo and Josephus is representative) with a blessing. This blessing was almost certainly created *ad hoc* – in much the same way that, later in the century, Menander Rhetor advised the one giving a "bedroom speech" to conclude with a prayer, "asking the gods, on the couple's behalf, for a happy union, felicity, a lovely life, the birth of children, and the other blessings we have mentioned. You should try to treat all these themes concisely, with care only for grace and charm."[36] The tannaim never tell us what should go into the Jewish version of such a prayer.

In the first two centuries, Christians, pagans, and Jews, each in their own way, were slowly beginning to reevaluate the place of marriage in the divine economy.[37] Human marriage was taking on symbolic importance. Church fathers and rabbis were both experimenting with the symbolic possibilities for marriage. This process, which might cautiously be called the sacralization of marriage, would greatly accelerate in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Christian asceticism played a powerful role in this acceleration. Christian writers of the first three centuries may have echoed Paul's sentiment that celibacy was better than marriage, but they also assumed a society whose members married and would, for the immediate future, continue to marry. Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and even Lactantius (writing in the early fourth century) all assumed that Christians would continue to marry.[38] Throughout the third and

[35] See *m. Meg.* 4:3 (ed. Albeck 2:365); *t. Meg.* 3:14 (ed. Lieberman 2:356-57); *ET* 4:631-51.

[36] Menander Rhetor 411 (ed. and trans., D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981], 156-59).

[37] For a summary of arguments that Christian rites of marriage drew on Jewish ones – and an insightful refutation – see L. Anné, *Les Rites des fiançailles et la donation pour cause de marriage sous le bas-empire* (Louvain: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1941), 103-114.

[38] Cf. P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 33-34, 122-39.

fourth centuries (most) Christian writers neither attacked marriage with any great vehemence, nor defended it with any great passion. Even Aphrahat, the early to mid fourth century expositor of and apologist for Syriac Christianity, writes that God "created marriage, worldly procreation, and it is very good; but virginity is more excellent than it."[39] No enduring Christian movement as consistently and vociferously advocated celibacy as did the Syriac Church, yet not even Aphrahat was prepared to attack marriage.[40]

Only in the fourth century did these ascetic movements create a "pro-marriage" backlash among the Church fathers.[41] John Chrysostom consistently defended marriage, seeing it as necessary for the creation of a society based on Christian households, although this defense of marriage was a "deliberately anxious vision."[42] "Paul" calls marriage a great *mysterion*, John Chrysostom says in his commentary on Ephesians:

> because it was a great and marvelous mystery that blessed Moses (or rather, God) had signified... Truly, truly, it is a mystery, and a great mystery that a man should leave the father who begat him, who gave him birth, who raised him, and the mother who went through labor for him, the parents who provided him with such benefits and who lived in such intimacy with him, that he should be joined to someone whom he has never seen, with whom he has nothing in common, and

On Lactantius, see J. E. Grubbs, "'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage: The State of the Question," *JECS* 2 (1994): 361-412, at 394-99.

[39] Aphrahat, *Dem.* 18.8 (trans. J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* [Studia Post-Biblica; Leiden: Brill, 1971], 81).

[40] On asceticism in the Syriac Church in Persia, see A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (2 vols.; CSCO 184; Louvain: CSCO, 1958), 1:173-287. Murray succinctly states about the Syriac sources, "On marriage we find nothing" (R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 154).

[41] The rise of Christian asceticism is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. For some comments, see Brown, *Body and Society*, 178-284. There were, of course, Christian discussions on the value (or its lack) of marriage in the second and third centuries, but these discussions assumed a new importance in the third and fourth centuries.

[42] Brown, *Body and Society*, 308. Cf. C. Scaglioni, "Ideale coniugale e familiare in san Giovanni Crisostomo," in *Etica sessuale e matrimonio nel cristianesimo delle origini* (ed. R. Cantalamassa; Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1976), 273-422, esp. 273-378.

> that he should honor her above all others. Truly, it is a mystery that the parents are not upset when this happens, but only when it does not happen, that they are delighted to spend vast sums of money on this. Truly, it is a great mystery, but one that contains some ineffable wisdom. From the beginning Moses revealed this in prophecy, and now Paul proclaims it in these words: "I am speaking of Christ and the church."[43]

Chrysostom defended the use of traditional wedding customs, such as crowning (now interpreted as a symbol of victory over the spirit of fornication), and seems to have known of a standard marital blessing.[44]

The Christian ascetic movement, in fact, led to a more mature Christian understanding of marriage.[45] Jerome's intemperate and extreme attack on marriage engendered more than one response that sought to fix the place of marriage in the divine economy.[46] In the late fourth century, for example, "pseudo-Ambrose," Ambrosiaster, penned a sustained defense of marriage and procreation in response to the growing ascetic movement.[47]

Yet it was Augustine who contributed the most to a Christian understanding of marriage in late antiquity. In answer to Jerome, in 401 Augustine wrote *On the Good of Marriage*. Clearly struck by the Vulgate's translation of *mysterion* in Ephesians as *sacramentum*, Augustine, as noted, called marriage "a sort-of sacrament" (*quoddam sacramentum*).[48] Elsewhere in this same tract, Augustine states, "The good of marriage, therefore, among all nations and peoples lies in the purpose of procreation and in the faithful preservation (*fides*) of chastity. But for the people of God the good of marriage lies also in the holiness of the sacramental bond (*sacramentum*)."[49] Augustine's meaning of the term *sacramentum* is not entirely clear,

[43] John Chrysostom, *Hom. 20 Eph.* 4 (*PG* 62:140; trans. Hunter 83-84). Cf. Scaglioni, "Ideale coniugale," 345-64.

[44] Cf. Anné, *Les rites des fiançailles*, 159-60; Ritzer, *Mariage*, 135-36; Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 23-24.

[45] Cf. Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 19.

[46] Cf. Brown, *Body and Society*, 366-86.

[47] Cf. D. G. Hunter, "*On the Sin of Adam and Eve*: A Little-Known Defense of Marriage and Childbearing by Ambrosiaster," *HTR* 82 (1989): 283-99.

[48] Augustine, *Bon. conj.* XV.17 (*CSEL* 41:209).

[49] Ibid., XXIV.32 (*CSEL* 41:226-27; trans. Hunter 120).

but he generally uses the term to denote "indirect symbols or signs. They are the mysterious but always suggestive signs of our salvation."[50] A sacrament, according to Augustine, also has a social dimension. The performance of sacraments – externally visible symbols of a higher truth – gives unity to the Christian community, making the community itself externally visible. "I do not think that [the unifying bond of marriage] could be so powerful if there were not attached to it a kind of sacramental significance of something greater than could arise from our feeble mortality…"[51] The natural association of marriage (*societas*), and the mutual fidelity of spouses, appear to be externally visible symbols of the higher reality of Christ's relationship with the church, and the *societas* of all Christians. Augustine made the conjugal couple, rather than the household, the fundamental unit in his political vision, again paralleling the union of Christ to the Church.[52]

Judith Evans Grubbs has demonstrated that Constantine, and the "official" conversion of the empire to Christianity, did not bring about a dramatic shift in marriage.[53] Traditional marital values continued to flourish, even in a Christian environment.[54] But Christians, and not only the elite theologians, were beginning to see marriage differently. Christian art from late antiquity reflects a more common understanding of marriage as serving as a metaphor for God's relationship to the church.[55] In the Greek East, as in Augustine's West,

[50] F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: Church and Society at the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (trans. B. Bettershaw and G. R. Lamb; New York: Harper, 1961), 281. Cf. E. J. Cutrone, "Sacraments," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. A. D. Fitzgerald; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 741-47.

[51] Augustine, *Bon. conj.* VII.7 (*CSEL* 41:197; trans. Hunter, 109).

[52] Cf. Augustine, *Civ.* 15.16.3, and the comments of B. D. Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine," *Past & Present* 115 (1987): 10-11.

[53] Grubbs, *Law and Family*, esp. 317-21.

[54] An intriguing example of this survival might be found in the writings of Dioscorus of Aphrodito, in Egypt. Born around 520 C.E., Dioscorus grew up in a Christian household and received an excellent classical education. In an epithalamium from c. 566, for example, Dioscorus invokes Athena and the "savior of homes" (σωτερ μ[εγα]ρων) (Jupiter?), and reflects entirely traditional values. See L. B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito: His Work and his World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 81-84.

[55] Cf. G. Vikan, "Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium," *DOP* 44 (1990): 145-63.

Christians were developing a distinctively Christian understanding of marriage.

Unlike Augustine, the rabbis never composed a theology of, or defense for marriage. Nevertheless, numerous rabbinic dicta that appear to date from the mid to late fourth century and beyond reflect a similar shift in their evaluation of marriage. The cause of this mutual shift is unclear; I will return to this question toward the end of this essay. In any case, the rabbinic reevaluation of marriage can be seen in three areas: the development of a myth that firmly grounds marriage and its contemporary practice as part of God's original plan; a move toward standardizing the wedding liturgy; and a Jewish use of the marital metaphor, comparing God's relationship with the Jews to a marriage.

Two midrashim from Genesis Rabba illustrate the development of a marital myth. The Bible records two accounts of creation. In the first account, God "created man in His image, male and female He created them" (1:27), and then He "blessed" them and commanded them to procreate (1:28). The second story contains a much more elaborate account of the creation of humankind, and the creation of marriage:

> (18) The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." (19) And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them… (20) And the man gave names to all the cattle…but for Adam no fitting helper was found. (21) So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. (22) And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman (*le'isha*); and He brought her to the man. (23) Then the man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman (*'isha*), for from man (*me'ish*) was she taken." (24) Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife (*be'ishto*), so that they become one flesh (Gen. 2:18-24).

One midrash, troubled by the ambiguous blessing in Gen. 1:28, reads:

> A. We learn: A virgin is married on the fourth day [i.e., Wednesday], and a widow on the fifth day [i.e., Thursday]. Why? Because it is written [in Genesis 1] concerning [the days], "blessing." But it says

"blessing" only concerning the fifth [Gen. 1:22] and sixth [Gen. 1:28] days! Bar Kapara said: "Wednesday is the eve of Thursday, and Thursday the eve of Friday..."

B. R. Abbahu said: "The Holy One took the cup of blessing and blessed them."

C. R. Judah said in the name of R. Simon: "Michael and Gabriel were the marriage attendants of the first Adam."

D. R. Simlai said: "We find that the Holy One blesses grooms, adorns brides, visits the sick, buries the dead, and recites the mourners' blessing. 'Blesses grooms' – as it is written, 'And God blessed them.' 'Adorns brides' – as it is written, 'And God fashioned the rib...' (Gen. 2:22)..."[56]

The homilist first conflates the two creation stories. God did not merely create the first couple, bless them, and command them to procreate; He actually married them. The homilist thus combines the first creation account, which mentions only blessing, with the second, which mentions marriage but no blessing. The result is something new. A wedding and its rituals are now made part of the divine plan, with the original wedding serving as a prototype for future wedding rituals. Creation becomes the prototype for the day on which a wedding is to take place; the presence of wedding attendants; the grooms' blessing; and the adornment of the bride.

The midrash is itself a pastiche, and the homilist's originality can be best appreciated when seen against the sources from which he appears to have drawn. The first sentence of (A), for example, is a citation from *m. Ketub.* 1:1. This mishnah offers a different reason for marrying on Wednesday: "Because twice a week the courts would sit in the cities, on Monday and Thursday, so if he had a claim against her virginity he could rise early [and bring it] to the court." Only our midrashic tradition and the talmudic commentary to this mishnah justify these dates as part of the *natural order*, as auspicious times.[57] The justification that marriage is part of the natural order, in fact, plays a major role through the discussion in the Yerushalmi. Although the *baraita* (A) in the midrash is ascribed to the tanna Bar Kapara, it is absent from any tannaitic document. By centering exclusively on this "natural" justification, the homilist is conceptually

[56] *Gen. Rab.* 8:12-13 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 66-67).
[57] *y. Ketub.* 1:1 (24c); *b. Ketub.* 5a.

linking the proper day for marriage with God's will, rather than (as in the mishnah) practical civil considerations. The days have intrinsic holiness.

Several other rabbinic sources associate "the cup of blessing," (B) with the blessing after meals.[58] In each of these sources, however, it is a man, not God, who takes the cup. Our midrash implies that God recited the "grooms' blessing" mentioned and justified later (D). I will return to the grooms' blessing.

Angels served as Adam's marriage attendants. The use of groomsmen in contemporary marriages is well attested in rabbinic literature.[59] The assertion that Adam had groomsmen appears only in rabbinic literature more or less contemporaneous with, or post-dating, the tradition here.[60] There is, of course, no mention of such men in the biblical account. Another Palestinian tradition compares the dancing at each wedding to the dancing of angels.[61]

Perhaps most striking is (D). Here, the homilist summarizes the point of the midrash: contemporary marriage is modeled on the original marriage, and thus carries divine origin and sanction. There is, indeed, an earlier rabbinic parallel to this tradition, attributed to a Palestinian amora, but this earlier tradition *omits* mention and justification of God's actions regarding grooms and brides.[62]

This entire midrash, then, appears to have been based on earlier traditions that the homilist has reworked. Many of the homilist's sources appear in earlier documents; those that do not appear more organic in their other contexts. Our homilist has reworked and integrated them in order to express a new understanding of human marriage, and God's role in it.

A similar midrashic reworking of earlier material can be seen in a second midrash from Genesis Rabba:

[58] See, for examples, *m. Meg.* 4:3 (ed. Albeck 2:365); *t. Meg.* 3(4):14 (ed. Lieberman 2:356-57).
[59] Cf. N. H. Tur-Sinai, "Shoshebin," in *Sefer Asaf: Qoves ma'amare mehqar mugash likhvod Harav Prof. Simhah Asaf* (ed. M. D. Cassuto, Y. Klausner, and Y. Gutman; Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1953), 316-22.
[60] Cf. *Eccl. Rab.* 7:6 and *ARN* A 4 (ed. Schechter, p. 19) for other traditions of Adam's marriage attendants. *B. 'Erub.* 18b contains a parallel tradition, but the attribution is unclear. *B. Ber.* 51a contains mention of the "cup of blessing" outside of a marital context.
[61] *Y. Hag.* 2:1 (77a).
[62] *B. Sotah* 14a.

A. R. Aibo, and some say in the name of R. Banya who taught it in the name of R. Shimon b. Yohai: "He [God] adorned her [Eve] like a bride and brought her to him."
B. There are places that call braided hair *banayta*.
C. R. Hama said in the name of Rabbi Hanina, "Do you think he brought her to him under a single carob or sycamore tree? Rather, he adorned her with twenty-four ornaments, and then brought her to him, in accord with what is written: 'You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your adornment: Carnelian, chrysolite, and amethyst; beryl, lapis lazuli, and jasper; sapphire, turquoise, and emerald; and gold beautifully wrought for you, mined for you, prepared the day you were created'" (Ezek. 28:13).[63]

Here the problem for the homilist is the first verb: what does it mean that God "built" or "fashioned" (*vayyiben*) Eve from the rib He took from Adam? The answer comes from colloquial language. According to (B), the colloquial word for a certain hair-style (presumably one commonly used by brides) has the same linguistic root as the word "build" used in Gen. 2:22. This allows the rabbi to interpret the word "build" as also implying "adorn." Because the second verb of Gen. 2:22, "and he brought her," can (in rabbinic Hebrew) also imply marriage, (A) can understand the entire verse as referring to the preparation and marriage of Eve, rather than her creation.

This midrash, too, is built from earlier traditions. (B) appears a few times in the Talmuds, but in the majority of cases it is cited in order to prove that braiding one's hair in this manner is a form of "building", and hence is forbidden on the Sabbath.[64] The midrashic explanation of Ezek. 28:13 in (C) is unique. More commonly, the rabbis understand this verse as referring to the number of *huppot* that God made for Adam. Instead of referring to wedding canopies, however, the *huppot* mentioned in these other sources refer to eschatological protective dwellings.[65] Because in these other sources the numerical correspondance is stronger, it is most likely that the homilist of our midrash knew and reinterpreted this earlier tradition. That is, the homilist knew what he wanted to say, and then found a scriptural "hook" that could more or less hold it. Not only

[63] *Gen. Rab.* 18:1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 161).
[64] *Y. Šabb.* 10:7 (12c); *b. Šabb.* 95a; *b. Nid.* 45a.
[65] Cf. *b. B. Bat.* 75a; *Lev. Rab.* 20:2 (ed. Margoliot, 446).

is marriage *per se* part of the divine plan, but so too are rabbinic wedding customs. The first wedding has become a model for all subsequent wedding practices.

Two features of these midrashim deserve emphasis. First, although they describe the same customs, these midrashim are qualitatively different from the glancing mention of wedding customs found in the tannaitic sources. For the tannaim, wedding customs were of no interest or importance: they bore no religious significance. By contrast, the amoraim infused cosmic significance into customary, essentially common circum-Mediterranean wedding rites. The second feature worth noting is the use of the verses. For Christians, Gen. 1:27-28 was the passage most frequently used in marriage liturgy.[66] Typically, the rabbis used Gen. 1:28 as a justification for procreation, not marriage.[67] The use of Gen. 1:28 for marriage here might be a reaction to Christian uses of the verse, and the use of Gen. 2 could have been an attempt to counter Christian claims that the story of Adam and Eve was one of sin and the fall.

Palestinian rabbis also discussed contemporary wedding customs in ways that emphasized this new sanctity. The word for "litter" (*'apiryon*) appears only once in the Bible, in Song 3:9, where it denotes Solomon's carriage. The same word is frequently used in rabbinic Hebrew to denote the bridal litter used as part of the wedding procession.[68] Rabbinic commentaries on this verse tend to equate the "litter" with either the Temple (or Tabernacle) or the ark for the Torah, and then make an analogy between this structure and the litter that a king builds for his nubile daughter.[69] Implicit in this analogy is the equation of a bride in her bridal litter to something precious and divine; she is in a place of sanctity. Similarly, as we have seen above, Palestinian rabbis play on the word *huppah* to indicate both God's guiding and protecting Israel and the bridal chamber. Elsewhere, Canticles Rabba compares the bride's ornaments to the

[66] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 15, 30. This is not to say that patristic writers did not mobilize Gen. 2 in their discussions of marriage. Cf. Scaglioni, "Ideale coniugale," 295-315 for the intricate ways in which Chrysostom uses Gen. 2:24.
[67] Cf. J. Cohen *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 67-165.
[68] See especially, *m. Sotah* 9:14 (ed. Albeck 3:260).
[69] *Cant Rab.*, ad loc.

24 books of Scripture that adorn a scholar: the effect of the midrash is to give a "higher" meaning to what would ordinarily be considered simple jewelry.[70] "Moses established the seven days of celebration [following a wedding]...," the Yerushalmi asserts, adding penultimate authority to the popular custom.[71]

This new understanding of marriage also informs the codification and formulation of the wedding liturgy. From the second century, as we have seen, both Jews and Christians knew of the practice of wedding blessings. Only beginning in the fourth century, though, does it appear that Christians, particularly in the Greek and Syriac speaking churches, standardized these blessings[72] The rabbinic standardization of wedding blessings also probably began in the fourth or fifth centuries:

> R. Hanan of Sepphoris interpreted the verse [Song 2:2: "like a lily among the thorns"] as referring to acts of kindness... To ten who entered in order to cause the bride to enter [her husband's home], and none knew how to bless the grooms' blessing, and there was among them one who knew how to bless the grooms' blessing, he is similar among them "like a lily among the thorns."[73]

If genuinely attributed, this statement might date to the late third or early fourth century, although it is safer to date it to the redaction of Leviticus Rabba, in the fifth century. Like recitation of the *shema* and the mourners' blessing, also mentioned in this tradition, the grooms' blessing is something that can be taught, presumably in more than the outline form known to Menander Rhetor.

Although the only talmudic text of the grooms' blessing is attributed to a Babylonian amora and found only in the Bavli, it is likely that some rabbinic standardization of the wedding blessings took place in Palestine as well.[74] The Bavli attests to a Palestinian "order"

[70] *Cant. Rab.* 4:8:1

[71] *Y. Ketub.* 1:1 (25a). The precise wording of this tradition ("Moses established") is rare in the Yerushalmi, and refers only to liturgical practices. Cf. *y. Ber.* 7:4 (11c); *y. Meg.* 3:7 (74c); 4:1 (75a).

[72] Cf. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 21-32; Anné, *Les rites des fiançailles*, 220-23.

[73] *Lev. Rab.* 23:4 (ed. Margaliot, 530). There is a parallel to this tradition at *Cant. Rab.* ad loc. 2:2:4. Cf. *b. Hul.* 9a. Heinemann uses these texts to argue that there were several authoritative versions afloat. Cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1977), 47-48.

[74] *B. Ketub.* 8a.

for the grooms' blessing. Ambrosiaster implies that the Jews had a standard wedding liturgy, for the marital blessing "was preserved by the synagogue and now celebrated by the church."[75] A compilation of differences between the practices of Palestinian and Babylonian Jews found in the Cairo Geniza (and probably a relatively late composition) states that Palestinian Jews would recite a grooms' blessing of three benedictions, perhaps indicating standardization by this time.[76]

It is interesting to note that Babylonian rabbis too emphasized the sanctity of marriage. This link is explicit in the betrothal blessing, which appears to have been said only in Babylonia: "Rav Aha son of Rabba would close [the betrothal blessing] thus, in the name of Rav Judah: Praised are You, Lord, sanctifier of Israel by means of *huppah* and *qiddushin*."[77] The connection in this version between sanctity and marriage was so clear that it made the Geonim uncomfortable.[78] The absence of a betrothal blessing among Palestinians, as among contemporary Christians, indicates the lack of importance of betrothal itself in Palestine.[79] *Masekhet Kallah,* of unclear but probably late provenance (eighth century?), contains the bald statement that, "a bride without a blessing is as forbidden to her husband as a menstruant."[80] While it is not clear whether this statement refers to the betrothal or wedding blessings, it does indicate that, at least by the Geonic period, some rabbis saw a blessing as essential to the formation of marriage.

Finally, the increasing rabbinic sacramentalization of marriage can be seen in the rabbinic development of the marital metaphor. Rabbinic sources prior to the amoraic period almost never compare the

[75] Ambrosiaster, "On the Sin of Adam and Eve," 127:3: "benedictione...cuius rei tradito et in singoga mansit et nunc in ecclesia celebratur" (*CSEL* 50:400).

[76] *Hahiluqim sheben anshe mizrah ubene eres yisrael* (ed. Margaliot; no. 28, pp. 83, 143-45).

[77] *B. Ketub.* 7b.

[78] B. M. Lewin, *Otzar Ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries* (13 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1928-43), 8:23 (resp. 71) (Hebrew).

[79] On the absence of a betrothal benediction among Christians, see Anneé, *Les rites des fiançailles*, 155-60. Cf. M. L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 68-88 for the argument that betrothal, as a binding form of (inchoate) marriage, was not practiced in Palestine.

[80] *Mas. Kallah* 1:1 ed. (Higger, p. 123).

relationship of God and Israel to a marriage.[81] Only from the amoraic period, for example, do the rabbis, with any consistency, interpret Song of Songs as a metaphor.[82] The metaphor finds expression in the Babylonian version of the grooms' blessing. Blessings four and six read:

> Let the barren one rejoice and cry out when her children are gathered to her in joy. Praised are You, Lord, who causes Zion to rejoice with her children.
>
> Praised are You, Lord our God, king of the universe, who created gladness and joy, groom and bride, rejoicing, song, mirth, delight, love, friendship, peace, and companionship. Lord our God, may there soon be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of gladness and the voices of joy; the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride; the joyous shouts of grooms from their bridal chambers, and of youths from their [marriage] celebrations. Praised are You, Lord, who causes the groom to rejoice with the bride.

Jews who marry do not exactly replicate this divine relationship, according to these blessings, but they do in some fashion signify it. Jewish marriage is implicated in God's relationship to Zion, and ultimately to eschatological redemption. The text itself is Babylonian, but it is likely that at least the ideas behind these blessings originated in Palestine.[83]

Other midrashim and *piyyutim* similarly attest to the growing Jewish popularity of this metaphor. *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana*, for example, explicitly links Num. 7:1 ("on the day that Moses finished (*kallot*) erecting the Tabernacle") to the day that Israel married God: this interpretation of the verse (based on a word-play on *kallot*, which

[81] See Satlow, "Metaphor of Marriage."

[82] Boyarin, "Two Introductions." Cf. E. E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk Literature* (ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy), 247-74. Cf. R. Kimmelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third Century Jewish-Christian Disputation," *HTR* 73 (1980): 567-95; M. Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (trans. B. Stein; SUNY Series in Judaica; Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 83-94.

[83] Cf. Heinemann, *Prayer*, 48-69 on the fourth marriage benediction. For a discussion of the provenance of this idea, see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 65-66.

can mean "brides") does not appear previously.[84] Yannai wrote several *piyyutim* that use marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel; one allegorizes the marriage between Jacob and Leah.[85] Yannai's *piyyut* for the seventh day of Passover is an extended praise of God in the language of Song of Songs.[86] Language from the Song of Songs similarly infuses a relatively late Aramaic *piyyut* for Passover.[87]

The rabbis did not have a word for "sacrament." But if we understand the word as Augustine seemed to, as a sign of something transcendent, then from the fourth century Palestinian rabbis considered marriage a "sort-of sacrament." These rabbis saw contemporary wedding practices as intrinsically tied to the natural and divine order, and they attempted to standardize ritual to reinforce this notion. They increasingly expressed the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage metaphor. In seeing their marriages essentially as social institutions, but ones that were beginning to accrue symbolic and transcendental significance, the rabbis (and Jews?) of late antiquity were not alone.

Like Christians and pagans, the rabbis had not yet arrived at a fully sacramental understanding of marriage. No extant Jewish art from late antiquity depicts a marriage, or marital ideology. The reliefs on Roman sarcophagi that depict spouses joined in the *dextrarum iunctio*, or the Christian reliefs of Adam and Eve, are entirely lacking from identifiably Jewish artifacts. Aramaic epithalamiums from the very end of late antiquity show no awareness at all of a sacramental understanding of marriage; like those of Dioscorus of Aphrodito they echo the traditional requests to God to protect the marriage and grant progeny to the couple.[88] Unlike the Church fathers, Palestinian rabbis rarely rail against or attempt to reinterpret contemporary

[84] *Pesiq. Rab. Kah.* 1:5 (ed. Mandelbaum, 9-11).

[85] Z.M. Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai according to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1985), *Piyyut* 27, 1:171-75 (Hebrew). Cf. Rabinovitz, 2:272-89.

[86] Rabinovitz, *Liturgical Poems*, 2:266-72.

[87] *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity* (ed. M. Sokoloff and J. Yahalom; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and the Humanities, 1999), 78-82 (Hebrew).

[88] For these *piyyutim*, see ibid. 258-77.

wedding rituals.[89] We are not yet at a time that demanded a proper and standard liturgical order for marriage.[90] Jews, Christians, and perhaps pagans were fellow travellers, all were moving in the same general direction, but their meanderings were local and specific.

Clearly this hesitant shift in the appraisal of marriage in late antiquity is part of several larger stories. If, as I think is likely, the rabbinic shift is a reaction to the Christian evaluation of marriage, then it is part of a more general Jewish adaptation of and response to Christian practices in Late Antiquity, the contours of which are only just becoming clear.[91] The Christian promotion of the sacramental nature of marriage (a view that responds to the contestation of marriage by Christian ascetic groups) may have prompted the rabbis to attempt to wrest control of this image. The new Jewish emphasis on the marriage bond might also signal a change in the dynamics of the family. An increasing emphasis on marriage might imply a weakening of the traditional importance placed on cognate bonds.[92]

At the same time, this shift in the evaluation of marriage is part of the broader phenomenon of religious definition. "What was taking place in late antiquity in intellectual and imaginative terms," Averil Cameron writes, "was surely a competitive process of system

[89] See ibid. 272-75, an Aramaic *piyyut* that dwells on the crowning of the newlyweds but offers no interpretation of this custom.

[90] See the responsa attributed to Hai Gaon in Lewin, *Otzar Ha-Geonim*, 8:18-19 (resp. 60): "In Khurasan, for many years – more than 100 years – it was the custom to betroth with a ring in the drinking house, and [to do things] similar to this. And the mistakes increased, mistakes and disputed betrothals, and the matter was injurious. And our elder, our master and teacher, Judah Gaon (c. 906-917), fixed [this] for them, that they betroth only according to the Babylonian order, with a *ketubba*, and signed by witnesses, and the betrothal blessing… And anyone who betroths without a *ketubba* and betrothal [contract], they fine him until he sets the matter right."

[91] For some very insightful and provocative explorations of implicit Jewish responses to Christianity, see I. Yuval, "The Haggadah of Easter and Passover," *Tarbiz* 65 (1995): 5-28 (Hebrew); Boyarin, *Dying for God*.

[92] See M. L. Satlow, "'One Who Loves His Wife Like Himself': Love in Rabbinic Marriage," *JJS* 49 (1998): 67-86. It is worth noting that the rabbis do not ritualize all life-cycle events: birth and bar-mitzvah remain underdetermined throughout antiquity. On the development of rituals of childhood, see I. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

construction, a persistent impulse towards definition."[93] There can be little doubt that Jews too engaged in this construction, attempting to carve out a "Judaism" that was unique and "religious". While the rabbis never attempted, as did Christians, to sever religion from ethnic identity, they did attempt to make Israel's borders more porous. Converts, for example, could now be welcomed to "Israel".[94] Although scholars currently disagree about precisely when this process began and accelerated, there is an emerging consensus that the Judaism of the fourth century was engaged in "system construction" that allowed itself to be construed in non-ethnic terms.[95] The rabbis singled out marriage – normally a civil process, if one that required divine protection – and marked it as theirs. On both an institutional and individual level, marriage thus reinforced group definitions and boundaries. Marriage was one, but only one, of the tools with which Jews in Late Antiquity attempted to carve out their own unique religious space.

[93] A. Cameron, "Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity," in *Asceticism* (ed. V. L. Wimbush and R. Valanstasis; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 156.

[94] Cf. S. J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), esp. 198-238, 308-40.

[95] Cf. M. Goodman, "Nerva, the *fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity," *JRS* 79 (1989): 40-44; J. North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak; London: Routledge, 1992), 174-93.