

- Prinsloo, W. S. "The theology of the book of Ruth," *VT* 30 (1980): 330-41.
- Rowley, H. H. "The Marriage of Ruth." In *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, 163-86. London, 1952.
- Sasson, Jack M. "Ruth III: A Response," *JSOT* 5 (1978): 49-51.
- _____. "The Issue of *Ge'illāh* in Ruth," *JSOT* 5 (1978): 52-64.
- Thompson, Thomas and Dorothy. "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth," *VT* 18 (1968): 79-99.
- Wilson, Robert R. "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* 94 (1975): 169-89.

INTRODUCTION

I. Contents and Structure

The book of Ruth deals with the Moabite woman Ruth and how it came about that she of all people became the ancestress of Israel's greatest monarch, King David. One of the purposes of the book is therefore to demonstrate that when a foreign woman was given this role it was because God himself had chosen her, just as in his time he had chosen the patriarchs and their family. The story of Ruth is among the best, most charming narratives in the Old Testament—a literary masterpiece. Yet it is also a political statement on behalf of David's dynasty.

The book begins with a famine that forces a man from Bethlehem, Elimelech, to leave Judah together with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons. They seek refuge in Moab, where their sons marry two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Both marriages remain childless, and after some years Elimelech and his sons die, leaving the three women alone. Ruth then chooses to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and returns with her to Judah.

In Bethlehem Ruth meets a relative of her late husband called Boaz, while she is gleaning in his field. Boaz is kind to Ruth, and at Naomi's suggestion Ruth seeks him out later at the threshing floor in the hope that he will marry her, for Boaz is the kinsman-redeemer of Naomi and Ruth. Despite various difficulties Naomi's plan is successful; Ruth and Boaz marry and have a son. The book ends with their genealogy, culminating in David's name.

*The Sequence of Events in Ruth*¹

- I. The husbands die in Moab, and Ruth and Naomi return home to Judah (chap. 1)

¹Cf. Bezael Porten, *The Scroll of Ruth*, 1978, 23-49, whose content definition I accept. In the first two chapters, however, I divide up the text slightly differently from Porten, who divides chap. 1 into vv. 1-6, 7-19a, 19b-22, and chap. 2:4-23 into vv. 4-18a and 18b-23. The many rhetorical devices employed by the author of Ruth are analyzed in detail by Porten and Murray D. Gow, and despite differences of approach Gow accepts Porten's definition of the main structure of the book (Murray D. Gow, *The Book of Ruth*, 1992, 92).

Introduction

- A. After living in Moab ten years, Elimelech and his sons die (1:1-5)
- B. When Naomi wishes to return home, Ruth clings to her, but Orpah leaves (1:6-18)
- C. On arrival in Bethlehem Naomi laments her loss to the townswomen (1:19-22)
- II. Ruth gleanes in Boaz's field (chap. 2)
- D. Naomi consents to Ruth's plan to glean (2:1-3)
- E. Boaz shows favor to Ruth (2:4-17)
- F. Naomi and Ruth discuss what has happened (2:18-23)
- III. Ruth seeks out Boaz at the threshing floor (chap. 3)
- D₁. Ruth accepts Naomi's plan that she should go to the threshing floor (3:1-6)
- E₁. Boaz again shows favor to Ruth (3:7-15)
- F₁. Naomi and Ruth discuss what has happened (3:16-18)
- IV. Boaz marries Ruth, who becomes the ancestress of David's line (chap. 4)
- B₁. Boaz states publicly that he wishes to marry Ruth, and the anonymous kinsman-redeemer withdraws (4:1-12)
- C₁. The women of Bethlehem rejoice at the birth of Naomi's grandchild (4:13-17)
- A₁. Ten generations are born in Israel (4:18-22)

The Structure of Ruth

Ruth is one of the best-structured books in the Old Testament. It consists of four chapters, each of which comprises three smaller sections. Out of these twelve parts a unity is created that convinces the reader that the book ends precisely as intended.

A significant characteristic of the book's style is its widespread use of dialogue in which the main characters, though never Naomi and Boaz together, confront one another. Of the 85 verses in the book, no fewer than 55 are in dialogue form. Gathered around these are narrative sections that partly add background to what is to follow (e.g., 1:1-5) and partly create a transition from one section to the next, as, for example, the ending of the first two chapters.

On the basis of these observations a description of the book's structure is best undertaken through a treatment of the individual scenes that constitute the general narrative. Changes of time, place, action, and grouping of persons determine the criteria for this division, and it will become apparent that throughout the book there is a constant movement between Bethlehem and other places: Bethlehem—Moab—Bethlehem—the field—Bethlehem—the threshing floor—Bethlehem—the town gate—Bethlehem. Thus the book ends where it began, in the town linked to the name of David.

Another approach, employed by Murray D. Gow in his comprehensive

Introduction

analysis of the structure of Ruth, is through the rhetorical devices that the author utilizes. In this case there is an emphasis on the frequent use of circle compositions. This is seen at its clearest in the general structuring of the book which starts with a series of genealogical particulars and ends with a form genealogy. As outlined in the above sequence of events the book is built on the structure ABC DEF D₁E₁F₁ B₁C₁A₁, an almost perfect chiasmic composition. The first and last chapters correspond to each other, just as the two middle chapters reflect, and must be read in the light of, each other. In his rhetorical critical analysis Gow demonstrates how chapters 2, 3, and 4 are each built on a similar principle.² The author also employs smaller chiasma (cf. the relationship between 1:6ab and 1:7ab, or the mention of Elimelech's relative Boaz, in 2:1 and 2:3).

Gow's emphasis on the author's preference for chiasmic structures is important for an interpretation of the text, since it enables the reader to see where the central statements are to be found. Thus it is not mere coincidence that in both chapters 2 and 3 Boaz's wish that the Lord should bless Ruth forms the fulcrum.

Parallelisms are also frequently employed (e.g., between 1:3ab and 1:5a or 1:12 and 1:21). A further common rhetorical device is the repetition of key concepts, such as "return home," "glean," "show favor," "find favor," "I down," "kinsman-redeemer." We also find retellings of previous events—flashbacks—when Ruth relates her experiences to Naomi at the end of both chapters 2 and 3. The author can also anticipate coming events, such as Naomi's good wishes for her daughters-in-law (1:8-9), and Boaz's wishes for Ruth (2:12), wishes that are fulfilled in the course of the story. In various ways these devices serve to create a coherence between the individual parts and the book as a unity.

Thus, on account of its dramatic as well as its poetic character, the book can be divided up on the basis of both its narrative action of events and its rhetorical devices, with each approach supplementing the other. In fact they often lead to the same result. On the other hand, it occasionally turns out that when the narrative action appears to have reached a natural break, the author has entered, perhaps through a chiasmic construction, that the reader is not stopped short but is led on. This is the case in the transition from 1:5 to 1:6, where the action moves from a description of life in Moab to Naomi's decision to return home. But at the same time the first five verses form part of a larger chiasmic structure comprising 1:1-7b, which contains information on the two Moabit wives as its central element.³

Further examples are the transitions from chapters 1 to 2 and 2 to 3, where

²Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 46, 64, 81-82.

³See Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 28-30.

4 a single statement functions both as a conclusion and as a new beginning, like a hinge holding the separate sections together. Whatever divisions are therefore chosen, they will inevitably involve a break in other contexts, yet it is precisely the contexts across the breaks that confirm the continuity of the narrative. It must be heard or read at one sitting.

By contrast, it is often the sequence of events that leads the reader on, while the chiasmic structure creates a roundedness and a feeling of coming to an end. Thus Gow's analysis of chapter 4 demonstrates that the first 11 verses are a chiasmic structure, with v. 5 as the fulcrum. At v. 11b⁴ the actual legal case that began with the preparations in v. 1 is brought to a conclusion. But there is no major break here, since the result of the legal action has certain consequences which the subsequent blessings express. Nor does the Masoretic Text separate the legal case from the bystanders' wishes for the coming marriage, but allows the two to merge into each other.

Indications of time and tempo also serve the author's purpose in structuring the book. The first chapter opens with a time signal on the lines of "Once upon a time . . ." All that is known about the sojourn in Moab is that it lasted roughly ten years, and about the return home that it was at the start of the barley harvest. The events of the chapter thus stretch over a fairly long period, not clearly defined. Chapter 2, on the other hand, deals with the relatively brief harvest season (barley and wheat). After this events move rapidly, with chapter 3 covering a single night and chapter 4, a short legal scene, leading swiftly to the desired result: marriage and pregnancy.

Then, however, the tempo decreases markedly and we find the text involved again with a lengthy period of time, as at the beginning of the book. Now we hear about the months of pregnancy, and the family tree is listed generation by generation. Also there is a circular movement in the way time is depicted, with the book ending where it began, in a whole period. Within a few chapters we have moved from the period of Judges to Kings.

Another characteristic of the book's composition is the summarizing and evaluating dialogues that take place in each chapter. At the conclusion of chapter 1 Naomi comments on her own situation to the women of Bethlehem. It is her evaluation that is to form the background for the coming events. The same thing happens in the following chapters, where Naomi comments to Ruth on the day's events in chapter 2 and the night's events in chapter 3, while it is the neighboring wives in chapter 4 who comment to Naomi on the birth of Obed. The choice of this form allows the author time and again to put conclusions into the mouths of women, a factor that is hardly insignificant in a book about the choice of a woman.

⁴Gow follows LXX in this verse, with a division between v. 11b, where the legal case ends, and 11c with the blessings for the coming wedding. See Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 1992, 77–81.

The structure of the book of Ruth is marked by efforts to create both a roundedness and a forward drive in the narrative. For example, even though each of the four chapters is well-rounded, the reader is given a clear signal at the conclusion of each chapter as to what the next scene will be about. The structure of the book thus creates a feeling of a conscious control without the reader knowing beforehand how the initial unhappiness will be transformed into a happy conclusion. The fact that the rounded form does not create a closed room is also evident in that the book ends in a genealogy. This list of names rounds off the story but at the same time excites the reader to ask for more stories. What happened to this David who ends the book? The many intertextual signals have the same effect on the reader. The book may have come to an end, but it is clearly part of a much wider network.

Ruth deals with a series of crises which are gradually overcome so that emptiness is transformed into fullness. The famine in Judah is overcome by the journey to Moab. The loss of husbands is redressed in Ruth's case by her marriage to Boaz. And, finally, the lack of an heir is remedied with the birth of Obed, who proves even to be the ancestor of David. We are left in no doubt that behind these events there is a guiding hand that can send famine and elect kings.

2. Genre

Ruth belongs to the narrative genre. Hermann Gunkel has given the classic definition of the book as a *novelle*, a short story, more specifically an idyll.⁵ By "idyll" he means to stress the poetic and thus the literary qualities of the short story. Erich Zenger on the other hand points out that "idyll" underplays the action aspect of the book. Not only is a sequence of actions narrated, but behind it stands the real enactor, God himself. It is God's actions we are to learn about, not a series of admirable human qualities. Ruth therefore belongs together with the Joseph narrative and the book of Jonah as regards genre.⁶

It is characteristic of both Gunkel and Zenger to regard the short story as being the narrative, but to exclude the final David genealogy, which they take to be a later addition and therefore of no regard here. Indeed, there has long been general agreement that Ruth 4:18–22 is an addition. Edward F. Campbell calls these verses an editorial appendix,⁷ while Ernst Würthwein⁸

⁵Hermann Gunkel, "Ruth," in *Reden und Aufsätze*, 1913, 84–86. A meticulous survey of researchers' definitions of the genre of Ruth is to be found in Hagia Hildegard Wizenrath, *Das Buch Ruth*, 1975, 362–68.

⁶See Eric Zenger, *Das Buch Ruth*, 1986, 22–25.

⁷Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, 1975, 170.

⁸Ernst Würthwein, *Die fünf Megilloth*, 1969, 24.

speaks of the secondary nature of the genealogy. Behind these formulations lies the tacit assumption that the narrative existed before the genealogy. However, recent research shows that this assumption is far from being matter of course. Not least, studies of the book's structure and purpose have demonstrated that the genealogy performs an important function in the story's totality.

In his *Anatomy of Criticism*⁹ the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye points out that the purpose of assigning a genre to a text is not so much to classify as to clarify, that is, to uncover the literary ties to which the text is linked. As a result the many definitions of Ruth as a legend, a fairytale, a romance, an idyll, a folktale, or a short story must be seen as an attempt to find the text alongside which the book can be read and understood. We might even say that the choice of genre is the writer's signal to the reader as to how the text should be read.

Jack M. Sasson, whose commentary includes a number of recent views from the world of folklore, has put forward the thesis that the book is created on the model of a folktale. Ruth is *not* actually a folktale; it is a piece of literature created by educated writers.¹⁰ But it must be read in the same way as we hear a folktale. Here Sasson builds on Vladimir Propp's analyses of a group of Russian folktales, and demonstrates a clear structural similarity between those tales and Ruth. He stresses that a folktale is a closed form with no loose ends left at its conclusion. "Because a folktale leaves nothing that is unresolved, it becomes a self-contained entity. It is unnecessary, therefore, for a folktale to be burdened either by a historical background or by a sequel meant to link it with datable narratives. Thus, unlike other biblical narratives that gain by, indeed depend on, a historical setting, Ruth could easily be lifted out of the period of the Judges and still be appreciated as a superb work of art."¹¹

Despite its roundness Sasson has difficulty with the conclusion of the book, since it is unusual for a folktale to end with a genealogy. In fact Ruth is the only example of this in the Old Testament, according to Sasson.¹² He therefore considers whether the genealogy of 4:18-22 does not rather denote a new beginning to the folktale, or is perhaps the start of a new folktale about Obed: "From a Proppian perspective, *the genealogy of 4:18-22 actually begins the tale of Obed, rather than ends that of Boaz*!"¹³

However, this view stands in some contrast to Sasson's argument earlier in the commentary that the genealogy was tailor-made for the ending of the

⁹Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 1975, 247-48.

¹⁰Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, 1989, 214f.

¹¹Sasson, *Ruth*, 216.

¹²Sasson, *Ruth*, 179.

¹³Sasson, *Ruth*, 213.

book.¹⁴ Of course he is right that Ruth is the only *clearly* rounded text in the Old Testament that concludes with a genealogy, but in classifying the book as a folktale he forgets that in practice a classification means a clarification, in the sense of a clarity about which other texts the reader should relate to the one in question. What the contemporary reader knew in those days was a series of tales in which genealogies were a matter of course. If we were to assign a genre to Ruth within the Old Testament's own literary forms, the most obvious one would be the patriarchal narratives, which also have many structural similarities precisely with the folktale.

Where Ruth is a single account culminating in a genealogy,¹⁵ the patriarchal narratives are linked into a chain of tales that often end with a genealogy (Gen. 22:20-24; 25:1-4; 25:12-18; 25:19ff.; 35:23-29; 36). Genealogies in patriarchal times round off a story but are simultaneously new beginnings in the accounts of Jacob's sons and their internal rivalries (cf. the expression "Jacob's genealogy," Jacob's *tolēdôt*, stands in Gen. 37:2 as the introduction to the Joseph narratives).

In similar fashion the genealogy in Ruth functions as the conclusion to the book while simultaneously pointing forward to new tales, namely of the last shoot on the vine, David. Characteristic for such family histories is that one story gives birth to another, so to speak.¹⁶

Sasson's difficulty in deciding whether 4:18-22 is the natural ending of the book or the start of a new tale comes about because he settles on the genre of folktale and defines the book accordingly as a clearly delimited work of art that does not point beyond the text itself. For if there is one single characteristic of a genealogy it is that it points beyond the limits of the individual narrative to new generations (or previous generations) and their life stories.

A further difficulty with Sasson's method is his assertion that Ruth should be read independently of time. By sticking to the dogma of the independence and roundness of the text he prevents himself from questioning beyond the literary work's own limits to its social function (see Introduction, pp. 21-28).

All in all therefore we must conclude that the texts in the Old Testament that Ruth most closely resembles are the patriarchal narratives. In a combination of narrative and genealogy Ruth presents both the particular events that took place when God elected a Moabite woman and the line of descent of which she

¹⁴Sasson, *Ruth*, 180.

¹⁵In this connection, however, it should be considered whether the placing of Ruth between Judges and 1 Samuel, as is the case in LXX, can be seen as a continuation of the structure that we know from the patriarchal narratives, where the genealogy functions as a link between the individual tales.

¹⁶Cf. Westermann's formulation in connection with the genealogies in the Yahwist: "Die Genealogien . . . sind geradezu so etwas wie Pflanzstätten von Erzählungen vielerlei Art." Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, 1974, BKAT, I, Genesis 1-11, 17.

herself was part and to which she gave life. It is thus a feature of both the patriarchal narratives and Ruth that they do not close around themselves but point forward to new events.

3. Intertextual Reading

In recent exegetical research the concept of "intertextuality" has played a steadily increasing role. No text has come into being or is heard as an independent entity; all, it is rightly emphasized, are strands in a network of texts.¹⁷ That a text should come into being and be understood only in the light of other texts is not a new insight. Form critics have long stressed that texts belong to definite genres, to a particular *Gattung*, which is employed in particular situations. The dirge, for example, is normally used together with texts of the same or similar kind and in situations where there are grounds for mourning. And by choosing the dirge as a genre the author can ensure that the listeners understand what is being said within the context of the dirge.

From a form criticism perspective there is therefore no doubt that a text is understood via other texts. The account of Esau and Jacob's birth belongs to the group of birth legends, and for the reader who knows the genre it will be interpreted as such. For it makes a difference whether we read Gen. 25:19–26 as a legend or regard it as a description of a difficult birth. When read as a legend the text deals with the birth of a chosen one, and all the particular features of the conception and the actual birth serve to emphasize this. In this case it is not the mother's labor pains that command attention. That might be the case, on the other hand, if the women were sitting together relating their bodily experiences of birth.

When dealing with the intertextuality of a narrative there are good reasons for starting at the same point as the form critic and finding other narratives within the same genre in order to consider similarities and differences. This is not the end of the matter, however. Above and beyond the genre we must question thematic resemblances and similar situations. We may then find that texts that the form critic judges to be largely unrelated do in fact belong to a general network. While many form critics would make a sharp distinction between a genealogy and a birth legend, from an intertextual point of view we might expect that they do in fact belong within the same network. For the point of the birth legend is precisely to give prominence to a great member of the tribe to whom the listener is probably related, or knows in some way.

The concept of intertextuality thus indicates a wider field of texts than the *Gattung*, or genre, to which a particular text belongs, and this has conse-

quences for the interpretation of the ending of Ruth. Here the form critic would note the difference between two such dissimilar genres as the birth legend and the genealogy and conclude that the latter is a later addition. The intertextual critic, in contrast, is interested in a possible link between the two texts and examines whether they do not in fact belong within a common network. And so where earlier research has tended to regard 4:18–22 as a later addition, more recent research is much more inclined to see a link between the narrative and final genealogy.

However, the fact that intertextuality points to a larger network of texts does create certain problems. For in theory such a network may be endless. Each and every text has come into being on the basis of a network of other texts that the author consciously draws on and wishes the reader or listener to keep in mind during the experience of the new text. But this new text is also part of other networks that the author is unaware of: for texts have a history, they are reemployed in new situations, and new listeners link them to other texts. The interpretation of texts is therefore never at an end. Yet this does not prevent us, the readers, from choosing to concentrate on finding the texts that the author has used and expects to be known to readers and listeners. In this way we can seek to understand Ruth in the context that was the author's own. That is the basic premise of this commentary.

I take as my starting point for analyzing the author's application of older traditions in Ruth the work of the American literary critic Harold Bloom. In his poetics Bloom emphasizes that what interests him are those poets who wrestle with their great forebears: "My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors even to the death."¹⁸ Every poetic work is an erroneous reading of a previous work, says Bloom. One could also formulate this by saying that every writer wrestles like Jacob. Whom and what is fought against is up to the exegete to find out. For the biblical texts are themselves part of a long tradition and are a link in a continuous deconstruction of earlier texts. Yet the deconstruction is a reconstruction too. For from the first text the next is created, and this in turn nourishes new texts.

Bloom speaks of the poet's struggle to become himself or herself through the murder of his or her precursors. Such a parricide requires of course that both a child and a parent exist, that is, artists with a strong will and personality. And even if, in our "erroneous reading" of Bloom, we were to prefer a less violent word than "murder," such as "conversation," or "dialogue," there needs to be a writer with whom to hold that dialogue. But is it possible for exegetes today to operate with a clear line of authorial influence in the transmitted texts? Can we in other words speak without more ado of the "author" of Ruth? For our knowledge of tradition history points to a far more complex process of

¹⁸Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford, 1973, 5.

¹⁷Cf. Sipke Draisma, ed., *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in honor of Bas van Iersel*, Kampen, 1989, as well as Kirsten Nielsen, "Intertextuality and Biblical Scholarship," *SJOT* 2 (1990): 89–95.

origin than that which normally lies behind a modern poem, while at the same time the trend in modern literary criticism is toward a total devaluation of the author's influence on the text.

Finally, these days even the concept of "text" is being subjected to a comprehensive¹⁹ debate that must be taken into consideration when applying a conscious method to a text such as Ruth.

Textual Theory in Recent Literary Research

Scholarship used to believe that it could discuss the meaning of a text with relative assurance. The meaning was defined as what the author wished to pass on to the listener or the reader. There has long been a consensus that this is far too narrow a definition. The matter-of-course assumption that meaning comes about when the reader meets the author's intention via the text is no longer self-evident. The reasons for this are many, and we shall dwell only on a couple of the most important. The author is often quite inaccessible, a figure about whom we know only what can be deduced from the text. Moreover, even if we were fortunate enough to know the author's identity and had a wealth of information about his or her external circumstances and ideological attitude, it remains problematic to claim that the text contains precisely what its author believes intended, let alone to assert that the text really transmits what the author believes it says, or the "intentional fallacy." In recent textual analysis, therefore, of writer plays a very limited role; in fact he or she is regarded by a number of critics as "dead" in relation to the text.

The unambiguity of the text has been submitted to scholarly debate as well. Textual analysis in recent years has not only demonstrated how language is multiple in meaning, but has also underlined the need for the reader to become involved in an ongoing interpretation of the text, as well as, it must be added, the network of contexts into which every text fits. No text can be read in isolation. Yet it was precisely this constant interplay between text and context that created the problem, for in the wake of the "death sentence" on the author came the inquisitorial question: "Is there such a thing as a text?"²⁰ Can we still speak of a "text" with one specific meaning, which presents itself to the reader, when all the time the text must be read in the light of other texts? Or is that which we call the "meaning" of the text simply what every reader individually brings to, and therefore takes away from, the text?

¹⁹A clear introduction to some of the theories under debate is to be found in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford, 1983.

²⁰Cf. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, 1980, 305.

The Intertextuality of the Biblical Texts

This brief sketch of the postmodern situation for exegetes and literary critics can seem paralyzing. Yet it should not come as a surprise to biblical scholars that the authors of the texts we are to interpret are for the most part inaccessible; that the texts are multiple in meaning; that each one of them belongs in a network of other texts; and that reader responses are many and varied. That this is the case for exegetes is demonstrated with all possible clarity by the genesis and subsequent history of the texts themselves. The Old Testament is a work of tradition. It came into being through a lengthy process under constant reinterpretation and has given rise to a wealth of commentaries. Whoever interprets such a work must therefore have a sense of its potentiality for multiple meanings and must respect each text for such possibilities.

The conditions for interpretation outlined above have pointed to the multiplicity of language and the weaving of each individual text into a network of meaning. But the fact that a word, an expression, or a narrative contains a multimeaning potential does not mean that all of them are realized in the concrete situations where they are employed. Just as a sentence is always employed in concrete situations and contexts and gains its meaning thereby, so is a story employed in a concrete situation and is not to be read as a text subjected to every possible intertextuality. On the contrary, it is to be read precisely in the context which at the time in question, in the particular environment and in the specific situation, seems in best agreement with the text.

As readers we are not independent of our own time and surroundings. We belong a priori to one or several "interpretive communities" and therefore perceive within particular frameworks of understanding. A text is always read through other texts on the basis of particular expectations—which are either met or disappointed, but which are always present and therefore serve to limit the number of possible meanings.

The fact that the author is usually anonymous and absent (or in parts of an analytical study should be kept out of the analysis) does not mean that the author has been unable to help the reader follow the intentions he or she has had during composition. If we accept that every text is always a contribution to a dialogue with one or more earlier texts—or is an attempt to defuse a previous text—we receive through the text a steady flow of information about the intertextuality from which the author was working.

The author's help to the reader consists not only of "hints" to the previous text or texts it wrestles with. Also the "gaps" that the author has equipped the text with and which demand the reader's response can lead us in a definite direction, for example, back to the previous text.

In spite of the stress in recent years on the absence of the author and the

text's lack of unambiguity we must therefore assert that communication is possible. Admittedly it is not a direct dialogue between author and reader. What we as readers relate to is "texts" in the plural, not only the concrete text before us and the texts which we have as pre-knowledge but also the texts that the author (as well as possible later redactors of the text) intends as context.

The multiple meaning of the language and the necessity of an intertextual reading are realities; but the language is, as we have seen, an applied language. And thus we are taken out of the language system and into history and society, where the dialogue takes place. As readers we enter into concrete cultural and historical contexts. But this involves us taking responsibility for our share of the dialogue.

As responsible readers we must not just be sensitive to the signals that the text conveys, but also must be open to the discussions that our own reading can raise when we pass it on to new readers. The biblical texts belong to our own culture as legitimizing texts, and function in the church institutions as the basis for true preaching. The truth, in this context, is not of a preordained kind existing independently of university research and the church's application of it.

It is thus of considerable importance which methods we exegetes employ. Some methods open us up for a dialogue about the text, while others delimit the possible meanings of a text and canonize one particular interpretation as though it were the entire truth.

The purpose in writing this commentary on Ruth is to present the interpretations that appear most likely if we attempt to read the book within a network of texts out of which it came into being. It is not my intention to offer a complete, in the sense of closed, interpretation of the work.

4. Literary Context

The Author's Use of Older Traditions

A significant part of the intertextuality of Ruth consists of the traditions that the author draws on, expecting recognition among his audience. The difficulty for the modern reader, of course, is that we do not have the same background knowledge as they. There will be signals in the text that they picked up, but a whole no longer notice. Conversely our pre-knowledge will be marked by a whole range of later texts and experiences that were not available to them. So our interpretation of Ruth is always a reinterpretation. Nonetheless, with regard to methodology we can limit the risk of reading into a text by consciously questioning the signals that point to other Old Testament texts presumed known to the author and his audience.

In practice this means that we take explicit references such as the mention of Rachel, Leah, Tamar, and Judah as invitations to include precisely these

figures from patriarchal "history" in our interpretation. In addition, we regard the thematic link between the famine and infertility in Ruth and the patriarchal narratives as a conscious signal that the book should also be read as patriarchal history.

Thus Ruth belongs within an intertextuality of women's stories that deal with infertility and the triumph over it. The most obvious examples of women who do their utmost to get a son are Sarai's use of the Egyptian Hagar as a stand-in (Genesis 16), Lot's daughters, who conceive with their father and thereby become ancestresses of Moab and Ammon (Genesis 19), and Tamar, who seduces her father-in-law, Judah (Genesis 38). The stories of Rebekah's, Rachel's, and Hannah's difficulties in having children can also be included in this context.

All these stories belong to the patriarchal narratives, but the very word "patriarchal" tempts us to overlook the crucial role that women play, and the wealth of stories testifies to their efforts. Without women there are no patriarchs.

The Link between Ruth and Tamar

The clearest signal in Ruth refers to Tamar, who gave birth to Judah's twins, Perez and Zerah (cf. the blessing in 4:12 and Perez's genealogy in 4:18-22). In this context, therefore, we shall concentrate on the link between Ruth and Tamar and through this on Boaz's family background.

The main content is as follows. The patriarch Jacob's son, Judah, marries a Canaanite woman, Shua's daughter, who bears him three sons. Judah chooses Tamar as a wife for his eldest son, Er. Er however dies, leaving Tamar childless. Judah then asks his second son, Onan, to enter a brother-in-law marriage with Tamar, but he too dies, as a punishment for refusing to make his sister-in-law pregnant. There is now only one son left, the young Shelah, and Judah hesitates to give him to Tamar. She is therefore sent home to her father to wait there until Shelah comes of age. After a long wait in vain Tamar decides to gain her right by a trick. She dresses up as a prostitute, seduces her father-in-law without being recognized, and becomes pregnant by him. When her pregnancy is discovered, she presents his seal and staff as proof that it is indeed Judah who has made her pregnant. Judah admits that she has right on her side because he did not give her his youngest son; thereafter he does not touch her. At birth it transpires that she is carrying twins. After struggling in her womb for primacy both boys are born and the midwife names them: Perez, the elder, and Zerah, the younger.

The story constitutes a clearly rounded whole. It begins with Judah's family situation, including the death of his two sons and Tamar's critical situation as a childless widow (Gen. 38:1-11), and ends with the resolution of the crisis: the birth of the twins (Gen. 38:27-30). The narrative thus begins and ends

with a broadly described genealogy. Claus Westermann²¹ regards this as a sign that the narrative has existed in oral form as a single story.

As an independent narrative the story of Tamar deals with a resourceful woman who saves the family from demise by untraditional means. As such it reminds us of the other *stories of women*,²² where the tragedy of childlessness is turned around and all ends happily. Our sympathy is with Tamar, without Judah therefore becoming a villain. His reluctance to hand over a third son after losing two is perfectly understandable. Nor is there any doubt that he is an honorable man, who pays his dues where possible.

The depiction of Judah's reaction when the case is solved supports the corresponding picture of the honorable man. At first, hearing that Tamar is pregnant he demands that she be punished; but when the true nature of the case is revealed, he recognizes that she is more righteous than he. Thus he is not only righteous in the sense that he demands that the law should be upheld; he is also honorable in acknowledging that necessity breaks all laws.

So the story ends happily — for both sides. Tamar becomes a mother, securing her social situation. The widower Judah unexpectedly finds his two dead sons replaced by twins full of vitality, and is thereby recompensed. Moreover, the count of the birth gives the impression that it was not just an unusual woman who became a mother, but that the younger twin, Perez, who took the place of the firstborn, would also come to play a special role in the history of the family.

The Story of Tamar as a Link in the Patriarchal Narratives

Read in this way the story of Tamar draws a positive picture of one of the family's famous women. But if the picture frame is changed, the picture changes character. And if a story is placed in a new context, its meaning changes. By placing the story of Tamar immediately after the selling of Joseph and before his meeting with Potiphar's wife a crucial alteration takes place.

The overall frame is the narrative of Jacob and his family. Jacob is the chosen one. Admittedly he cheats his way to the firstborn's right and blessing, but at an important point he behaves as he should. He obeys when his father Isaac orders him to marry a Canaanite woman (Gen. 28:1ff). He fathers twelve sons, but just prior to the Tamar episode he loses his favorite son, Joseph. Incon-

²¹Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, BKAT.3, Genesis 37–50, 1982. Cf. also J. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis XXXVIII," VT 25 (1975): 338–61; J. A. Emerton, "An Examination of a Recent Structuralist Interpretation of Genesis XXXVIII," VT 26 (1976): 79–98; and J. A. Emerton, "Judah and Tamar," VT 29 (1979): 403–15 concerning Genesis 38.

²²Cf. the feminist interpretations of stories of women in the Old Testament in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, Sheffield, 1993. Of particular interest here is Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture?", 134–39.

solable, he sits back and thinks only of being reunited with Joseph in the kingdom of death. At the same time Joseph is sold to Potiphar.

Seen in this perspective there are features of the story of Tamar that take on a different aspect. We note that Judah mixes with Canaanites and even marries and has children with one of them. He chooses a daughter-in-law for his eldest son, and even though it is not stated directly in the text, it is likely that she too is a Canaanite.

The family is then struck down by the death of the eldest son. But surely nothing happens by chance in Jacob's family, that of God's elected? As a continuation of the account of the selling of Joseph, it is reasonable to see the son's death partly as a suitable punishment for the sorrow Judah caused his own father by making him "sonless," and partly as a consequence of Judah's having married a Canaanite woman.²³

In similar fashion a change takes place in our understanding of the meeting with Tamar. In the original version Judah's intercourse with the disguised Tamar shows that necessity is the mother of invention. But when the story is taken together with the account of the chaste Joseph, who knew how to reject the foreign woman who would seduce him (Genesis 39), then Judah's intercourse with Tamar is seen as the opposite of chastity: quite simply, it is incest. In both cases there are persons who should not be sexually active: in the first because they are too foreign for each other, in the second because they are too closely related.

That such a reinterpretation of the story is possible and has actually taken place at a later date appears from the book of Jubilees chap. 41, which clearly reflects a negative attitude to Judah's intercourse with Tamar. Judah's deed is and remains sinful.

As demonstrated, the story of Tamar can be read very differently depending on the context. This has a bearing on the historical context of Ruth. In a situation where the link with Tamar is seen as a disqualification for the family of David, the author of Ruth returns to the positive features in the Tamar tradition, thereby creating his own picture of the ancestresses of David.

Tamar and Ruth

The story of Tamar, as we now see, is placed in the context of the patriarchal narratives. But at the same time it must be seen as a precondition for Ruth, even though the two in the final redaction are not placed close to each other.

The woman's story that is the closest parallel to Tamar is that of Ruth. The author refers directly to Tamar when having the people of Bethlehem offer the wish that Boaz may have as many heirs as Judah with Tamar (4:12). This places the story in a context that must already be known to the listeners.

²³Cf. the antipathy to foreign women in Num. 25:1–5.

Of course it is not enough just to point to a single reference from one text to the other. Intertextuality must be more comprehensive in content if it is to influence an understanding of the text. Where then is the link between such stories?

The choice of narratives in the Old Testament would suggest that stories have been retained that spoke together, that supplemented one another, that set one another in relief. Open questions in a story call for answers in the form of the next story, which again raises new questions and answers.

The Book of Ruth as a Response to the Story of Tamar

The structure of Ruth is similar to that of Genesis 38. Both texts open and close with information of a family nature. In both, a critical situation arises because a young, childless woman loses her husband. But in Ruth the distress is increased by there being two childless women and a childless mother-in-law, all of whom are widows. In both texts interest is concentrated on the family of which Perez is to become the ancestor. In the story of Tamar this comes about through the birth legend, where Perez is the one who secures the birthright. In Ruth, on the other hand, we find Perez's genealogy, ending with David in the tenth generation. The texts agree that Tamar and Ruth become ancestresses; but only in Ruth are we led through Perez right up to King David.

The author of Ruth reemploys a Perez genealogy that has presumably existed in the context of the traditions of Tamar and Judah. The genealogy was the starting point, but also the problem and the occasion for creating the story (see pp. 23–28).

In both places the women are marginalized. Tamar has been sent away from her in-laws' family; home to her father, to wait for a young man whom she apparently never gets. Ruth, on the other hand, voluntarily renounces a return home to her mother and a new marriage. Instead she has linked herself to her mother-in-law, who can no longer give birth to a son to replace Ruth's dead husband. Both women elect to remain with the in-laws, but the motive of family fidelity plays a far greater role in Ruth, where her loyalty is mentioned time and again.

Ruth is also stated to have chosen Naomi's land, people, and God. The portrayal of Ruth's departure echoes that of Abram when he left his land, his family, and his father's house to go to the land that God would show him. But where Abram set off at the word of God, Ruth dares to break away with no word of any kind. The story shows, however, that this was counted to her advantage. Ruth is here depicted not just as a new and better version of Tamar, but also as a new and better version of Abram.

A corollary of being marginalized is that one can no longer use the normal channels of society to gain one's right. When women cannot acquire the nec-

essary son by pursuing the law and demanding their right, they must resort to trickery, which is closely linked to their sexuality. Tamar is forced to take on the guise of a prostitute and seduce Judah, while Ruth must choose the plan of lying beside Boaz and asking him to lay his garment over her naked body.²⁴ The difference between the two is that when Ruth refers to Boaz as a redeemer, it is because she is asking for more than a single night. She wants marriage. Moreover it is probable that both are marginalized by being foreign women. In the book of Ruth, however, this motif plays a far more important role than in Genesis 38, where Tamar is never directly referred to as a Canaanite. Thus it is the foreign woman whom Yahweh chooses as ancestress for David.

Finally, it must be emphasized that in Ruth the many prayers for Yahweh's intervention make it far clearer that behind the choice of David's family stands God himself. What Genesis 38 omits to say directly receives full expression in the depiction in Ruth of how Yahweh's choice repeats itself down through this family.

The transformations between Tamar and Ruth are due not only to a need for variation. Ruth does not tell the same story as Genesis 38. It is a new and better story, which derives from the author's wrestling with a powerful precedent. Through the book the reader is convinced that it was the God of Israel who intervened when Ruth became the mother of Obed, and that Ruth was not only chosen but was worthy of the choice. Ruth thereby becomes a better background for Perez's genealogy than the story of Tamar would have been.

The Recycling of the Ruth Narrative

There follows a brief demonstration of how rabbinical exegesis works in practice intertextually with Ruth by filling in many of the holes in the narrative with information from other texts.

The Targum to Ruth

The Aramaic version of Ruth²⁵ is simultaneously a translation and a commentary. The Hebrew text that is its basis corresponds to the Masoretic Text. The version follows the text closely, and the few deviations from the MT reveal

²⁴Cf. my interpretation of Ruth 3:4, 7 in Kirsten Nielsen, "Le choix contre le droit dans le livre de Ruth. De l'aire de battage au tribunal," VT 35 (1985): 201–12, where I show that it is Ruth and not Boaz who is naked.

²⁵Cf. Élan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, Rome, 1973, as well as D.R.G. Beattie, *Jewish Exegesis of the Book of Ruth*, 1977, 17–18, 21.

a close connection to the Peshitta. Woven into the translation are paraphrasal sections, while for the name of God the necessary paraphrases are employed. As a textual witness the Targum is of limited value, but as a contribution to the understanding of Jewish exegesis and thinking it is indispensable.

First and foremost the Targum shows which aspects in the story have required elaboration: the narrative amplifications underline not least the legal aspects of the book. Marriage with a Moabite woman is pronounced illegal, to be punished by death (*Targum to Ruth* 1:4–5). Ruth's wish to follow Naomi is expanded with a meticulous account of the law abidance expected of a proselyte (1:16). Ruth's strength to bear the yoke of the Lord's messenger is mentioned in 3:11, Ruth is described as a proselyte in 2:6, and the concept of levirate marriage is introduced in 3:10. Boaz is presented as a righteous judge whose prayers end the famine (1:6 and 3:7). Moreover, he has prophetic gifts and can predict that Ruth will be the ancestress of kings and prophets (2:11). Boaz's self-control at the threshing floor is also underlined (3:8).

The emphasis on the role of the law in this Targum is due to its liturgical use at the Feast of Weeks, where the lawgiving at Sinai was remembered. Thus Ruth is the proselyte par excellence who subjects herself unconditionally to the law; the lesson to be learned from this is that God rewards those who are faithful to the law.

Ruth Rabbah

Proof that detailed exegesis was not exhausted with the Aramaic versions of the biblical writings is clear from the rich literature of the Midrash.²⁶ The most interesting aspect of the *Midrash to Ruth*, namely, *Ruth Rabbah*, is its characterization. Elimelech is shown as a wealthy man who fled from the famine not because it was life threatening but because he was loath to help the destitute in his country. The very fact of leaving one's country without a compelling reason is regarded as a grave sin, and when this is combined with his lack of solidarity with the poor the reason for his premature death and the family's unfortunate situation is self-evident. He is guilty of his own fate.

Ruth, on the other hand, is beautifully drawn. She may not be free of unchaste thoughts, but compared to the other gleaners women she is a paragon. In this respect great emphasis is placed on her conversion, a fact which fits in well with the use of the book at the Feast of Weeks. Boaz is portrayed as a worthy representative of the righteous who resists all temptation, and as with the *Targum to Ruth* the concept of righteousness plays a major role.

Regarding interpretation there are many details of minor importance in the

elaboration of the narrative. It is worth dwelling on the origin of the Midrash, however. The basic exegetical principle is that missing information in one text can be deduced from other texts. In this way Ruth follows rabbinical thought in a constant dialogue with earlier texts, and itself provides material for later texts. *Ruth Rabbah* is therefore not a fabrication of fantasizing scribes but the result of learned rabbinical exegesis.²⁷

One of the problems that rabbinical exegesis has been concerned with and that plays a decisive role in the understanding of the genesis and function of Ruth is King David's Moabite origins. *Ruth Rabbah* to 4:18 puts it thus:

R. Abba b. Kahana commenced by citing the following verse: "'Rage and do not sin, [commune with your own heart upon your bed and shut up!]' (Ps. 4:5).

"Said David before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'How long will they rage against me and say, "Is this family not invalid [for marriage into Israel]? Is he not descended from Ruth the Moabitess?"'

"... commune with your own heart upon your bed': [David continues,] 'You too, have you not descended from two sisters? You look at your own origins "and shut up."

"So Tamar who married your ancestor Judah — is she not of an invalid family?

"But she was only a descendant of Shem, the son of Noah. So do you come from such impressive genealogy?"²⁸

The tone is didactic. It is not denied that David is descended from a Moabite woman, Ruth. But the sting is turned on those who take offense at David's background. Are they themselves of pure descent?

The Position of Ruth in the Canon

Originally the story of Ruth was an independent narrative retold on various occasions. It then acquired written form, but not until later was it placed alongside the other biblical books. In the Hebrew Bible Ruth belongs with the Scriptures. Among these the five festival rolls, the Megillahs, formed a special collection. These were used in the synagogue at the appropriate annual feast: the Song of Solomon at the Feast of Passover, Ruth at the Feast of Weeks, Lamentations at the Feast to mourn the destruction of the Temple, Ecclesiastes at the

²⁷Trygve Kronholm, "The Portrayal of Characters in Midrash Ruth Rabbah. Observations on the formation of the Jewish hermeneutical legend known as "biblical haggadah," *ASTJ* 12 (1983): 20.

²⁸*Ruth Rabbah: An Analytical Translation*, translated by Jacob Neusner, Atlanta, 1989, 197.

²⁶Cf. Beattie, *Jewish Exegesis*, 21–22.

Feast of Tabernacles, and Esther at the Feast of Purim.²⁹ Seen in this light the primary context for Ruth is the festival at which the book was used.

The use of Ruth at the Feast of Weeks was partly because the action takes place in the period between the Passover and the Weeks, during the grain harvest. But the link between the Feast of Weeks and the lawgiving at Sinai made vest. But the link between the Feast of Weeks and the lawgiving at Sinai made another aspect of Ruth significant. As is apparent from the *Targum to Ruth* and *Ruth Rabbah*, Ruth was regarded by the rabbis as an exemplary proselyte. Her acceptance of Israel's God as her own and her willingness to subject herself to the yoke of the law was emphasized as worthy of imitation. Finally it must be mentioned that according to an old tradition King David was not only born during the Feast of Weeks but also died at that time of year.

Against these traditions stands another view of Ruth which finds expression in its position in the Septuagint and the other translations. Here we find Ruth placed between Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel.³⁰ The redactors who gathered the Old Testament texts into a continuous account of the story of God and Israel have presumably sought to place Ruth in a position where it chronologically belongs. When the author has dated the events in the book to the period of Judges it makes sense to read it as a continuation of the other accounts of the Judges' period.

When read in this context the book links up with a series of narratives dealing with women who are used and abused. In Judges 19 we read of mass rape and the abuse of a Levite wife (also from Bethlehem). Chapters 20–22 deal with the subsequent revenge against the tribe of Benjamin who were guilty of the rape and what that involves in the way of injustice—also with the women who were finally forced to marry Benjaminites. As the last verse of Judges says: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

With this background Ruth serves as a transitional link between the period of lawlessness and the institution of the monarchy. Actually through a woman, and a foreign woman at that, the tribe which is to bear the greatest king of Israel is perpetuated. Ruth links Judges to 1 and 2 Samuel, where the introduction of the monarchy is a central theme and the rule of David a climax. But before we hear about the monarchy, Samuel's birth is related. Once again we meet the ancient theme of the woman who is infertile. Like Sarah and Rachel, Hannah has to watch her fellow wife give birth without being able to produce any children herself. She goes to the house of the Lord, laments her lot before God, and

²⁹Originally Ruth was placed together with the other writings, in fact even first, since Samuel was thought to be its author. Then came the Psalms. When Ruth became part of the Megillahs, two differing principles were employed, partly the feast's position in the calendar, partly the chronological date. For further discussion see Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, 1975, 32–36, or Sasson, *Ruth*, 11–13.

³⁰For further discussion as to what extent this is its original position see Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, 1988, 4–7.

is rewarded with a son, Samuel, who anoints both Saul and David. Again a woman's fate plays a crucial role in the people's future. But where Ruth takes the unheard-of path of visiting Boaz at night at the threshing floor, Hannah goes to Israel's God and prays herself to a child. Common to all the stories is that a child is elected to play a special part in the history of the people.

5. Historical Context *Genealogy and Narrative as Political Instruments*

Ruth is a literary work. This fact has caused a number of scholars to refuse to admit that the book has any other function than being good literature, i.e., that it is entertaining and instructive. Thus Hermann Gunkel rejects every attempt to find a hidden agenda in Ruth. The book is apolitical, simply a beautiful story about a widow's faithfulness. Its purpose is not to legitimize the Davidic dynasty, nor is it propaganda against Ezra and Nehemiah's view of mixed marriages.³¹

To this we may respond that a text that culminates in the birth of King David must have had a political purpose when it came into being. The portrayal of Ruth's path to marriage with Boaz is formed as an election story, which like the patriarchal narratives aims to persuade the reader that behind the election of the Davidic dynasty lies God himself.

The following examination of the book's historical context will therefore take the genealogy as its starting point, as we try to establish the situation in which such a genealogy could be of benefit. We shall then look to see whether in the so-called historical books of the Old Testament we can find a meaningful intertextuality for Ruth, and thereby demonstrate in what circumstances and to what purpose the book may, not necessarily must, have been constructed.

The Origin and Function of the Old Testament Genealogies

Regarding historical research³² the evaluation of the Old Testament genealogies has been marked by two different tendencies. Whereas a scholar like Heinrich Ewald regarded the genealogies as the best imaginable sources to the history of Israel, Hermann Gunkel maintained that the genealogies were literary constructions that served to create a link between persons in the individual traditions. The idea that the genealogies are reliable historical sources gave rise

³¹Gunkel, "Ruth," in *Reden und Aufsätze*, 88–89.

³²See the overview of historical research in Robert R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* 94 (1975): 169–89.

to a number of critical objections. The similarity between the genealogies in Genesis and various mythological texts from the Near East therefore convinced many that the genealogies too could be used as sources for the mythological ideas of early Israel and thus cannot be employed as sources for the real history. In addition to this came the division of Genesis by literary critics into several sources, with the indication that genealogies are especially to be found in late texts such as P and 1 and 2 Chronicles and are therefore hardly reliable history.

The debate on the source value of the genealogies was kept alive by, among others, W. F. Albright and Martin Noth. Albright's stress on the importance and credibility of the oral tradition led to renewed consideration as to whether some of the genealogies might not contain historically correct information. Also of significance was Noth's distinction between those genealogies that have a purely literary purpose and have never existed independent of the narratives they are now linked to, and those which have had a previous independent existence and can therefore be accounted of value as source material.

These nuances also characterize recent contributions to the debate. In pursuing Gunkel's line Marshall D. Johnson³³ points out that many of the genealogies have been employed to show Israel's link to its neighbors (e.g., Gen. 19:36–38; 25:12–16; 36; see also Genesis 10), or were created to link originally independent traditions regarding Israel's origins. He adds that the purpose of Genesis 10; 11:10–26, and Ruth 4:18–22 has been to cover periods in Israel's history where no accounts were available, while the genealogies in Genesis 5 and Genesis 11:10ff. have formed the basis of chronological speculations. The genealogies in 1 Chronicles 2–8, on the other hand, are based on military lists and have had a political function, just as some genealogies (partly in 1 Chronicles, partly in Ezra-Nehemiah) have been used to legitimize the right to certain public offices. In addition to this the genealogies have been employed to some extent as a demonstration of the purity of the postexilic community. Johnson thus made it clear that genealogies can have different functions.

The political purpose of the genealogies has been powerfully supported in anthropological quarters. Robert R. Wilson³⁴ distinguishes between three spheres where genealogies are used. The first is the family, considered through biological ties. The second is the politico-religious sphere, where, for example, the segmented genealogies (genealogies that carry on several lines) can be used to express the political power relationship at the time in question. In a so-

³³Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 1969, 77–82.

³⁴Robert R. Wilson's brief presentation in his article from 1975, "Old Testament Genealogies," *JBL* 94 (1975): 169–89, is developed in detail in his book from 1977 (Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, 1977).

ciety with a monarchy, however, there is a tendency to use linear genealogies as legitimation for the occupation of office. As a third factor Wilson specifies the religious sphere.³⁵

Since genealogies function in different areas and can undergo changes so as to agree with the actual power structure, a society can operate with internally differing genealogies, each of which serves a purpose. The realization that genealogies are not passed down in order to preserve historical facts but to reflect a contemporary power structure means that they must be regarded as valuable sources for these power struggles, but do not necessarily transmit correct facts about the tribal and family relationships.³⁶

The Genealogy in Ruth

Surprisingly, Wilson has not analyzed the genealogy in Ruth, merely mentioning it as an example of a linear genealogy of the type that is often used to legitimize a king's claim to the throne.³⁷ In our context, however, this remark is interesting, for how can the story of a marriage between the Moabite Ruth and the Israelite Boaz have served as a legitimation of David's right to the throne?

As has been demonstrated, genealogies have their function in a concrete society. As relationships change, they can undergo major or minor revisions to ensure their continued relevance. They thus reflect tensions in existing societies at various times, and in their creation and presentation show how the attempt has been made to give status to various persons or groups. We might well imagine that rival genealogies existed for so prestigious a figure as King David, some of them emphasizing his descent from the wealthy Boaz of Bethlehem and others pointing to the black spots in his career: the descent through both Ruth and Perez, i.e., a foreign woman whose ancestress seduced her own father and a man conceived through incest. And if we then ask who might want to promulgate such a tainted genealogy, the answer is: opponents of the Davidic dynasty.

According to the Old Testament, which is our only source of information for possible royal succession disputes in the early monarchy, relations between Saul and the ambitious David were stretched to the limit. Members of Saul's family had an immediate interest in making David's path to the throne as difficult as possible, just as they could see an advantage in defaming David and his family after his succession in order to promote their own family again.

³⁵Cf. Wilson, "Old Testament Genealogies," 180–82.

³⁶Cf. an example of a recent, very positive evaluation of the source value of genealogies in Gary A. Rendsburg, "The internal consistency and historical reliability of the biblical genealogies," *VT* 40 (1990): 185–206.

³⁷Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, 195.

as historical fact. As evidence of this David's flight to Moab after the break with Saul is often cited. In Mispe he is granted asylum for his parents by the Moabite king (cf. 1 Sam. 22:3-4). A. A. Anderson⁴⁰ believes that in the time before David became king, it was part of the family's tradition that it had foreign origins. Anderson defends the historical correctness of this with the argument that no one later would have thought of giving David a foreign ancestry. Thus, once he had gained power, the royal house had to form the family tradition into a suitable story to show its foreign origins in a more favorable light. This took place under David or Solomon, perhaps shortly after the division of the kingdom. Anderson further assumes some reworking of the material in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the problem with mixed marriages becomes acute, and so the redactor has sought to turn Ruth's marriage into a levirate marriage.

Anderson's division of the book's origins into such phases, where external circumstances have required certain revisions in principle, harmonizes with recent anthropological research. At first it is the family alone that is interested in David's origins. But when he is chosen as king, his genealogy suddenly takes on political significance. Now his family relationships can be used by his opponents in the struggle for power, and so the beautiful story of Ruth and Boaz is created to show off David in a more flattering light.

Anderson's demonstration of the need to elaborate the traditions surrounding David's origins seems convincing. What is harder to determine is at what point the political situation gave rise to such a book as Ruth.

If we are to outline a possible context on the basis of Old Testament accounts, then the last years of David's reign spring to mind, when succession disputes and revolts could be fertile ground for such literary activity.

Another possibility is the power struggle between Rehoboam and Jeroboam which led to the so-called division of the kingdom. According to 1 Kings 12 the whole nation gathered after Solomon's death to make Rehoboam king. But the rebel Jeroboam, who clearly acts as a rival to the Davidic dynasty (cf. the account in 1 Kings 11:26ff.), then returns home to participate in the negotiations with Rehoboam on a more moderate policy. The talks break down, and the Israelites reject Rehoboam with the words:

What share do we have in David,
what part in Jesse's son?
To your tents, O Israel!

Look after your own house, O David!
(1 Kings 12:16)

From this we can see that it is David, Jesse's son, whom the people will have nothing to do with and not just the person Rehoboam. The derisive sentence

⁴⁰A. A. Anderson, "The Marriage of Ruth," *JSS* 23 (1978): 172-73.

If Saul's family were to compete over genealogies, they would probably have pointed to David's doubtful line of descent. In contrast they would maintain Saul's pure line through wealthy people in the tribe of Benjamin and a name that suggested he had been born as the answer to many a prayer, just like Samuel.³⁸

Similarly the circles supporting the traditions of Samuel, the charismatic judge and prophet, would have wanted to promote their own interests by stressing the particular events surrounding Samuel's conception and birth (1 Sam. 1), thereby legitimizing Samuel's family as the elect of Yahweh of the tribe of Ephraim, and counting Joseph among their ancestors. If this is the case, the author of Ruth has also been competing with the story of Samuel's birth and has therefore had to create an equally powerful birth legend.

The Deuteronomists not only reject Saul's family, but in practice Samuel's too, as the final version of 1 and 2 Samuel proves, with David emerging as the victor. But individual accounts in the books may well have had an independent function before they became part of the historical work. They may have been part of a local power struggle in which various opponents of David's family had done their best to promote their own virtues in contrast to David's vices.

The author of Ruth is clearly not an opponent of David. On the contrary, the book can be interpreted as a conscious reaction to the smear campaign against him, the point being that everything the rivals regard as suspicious about the history of David's family points in fact to its special election through Tamar.

The inclusion of Ruth's Moabite origins and Boaz's descent through Tamar via Perez as a significant ingredient in the Ruth narrative suggests that knowledge of David's family relationships was so widespread that the facts could not be denied. The strength of the opponents' argument was that contemporary opinion not only knew their claims to be true but also regarded them as damaging.

So the attacks on David's family had to be taken seriously. What his supporters could do was to supplement his genealogy with a story that could present a completely different twist to the unusual origins; instead of denying them they simply reinterpreted them. Thus the author of Ruth had to take up a stance both on David's link to Judah and Tamar through Boaz and to the Moabites through Ruth. It is not just his Moabite background that is the problem, as previous scholars would have us believe.³⁹ The link to Judah and Tamar is equally compromising.

The Moabite origins of David's family are regarded by a number of scholars

³⁸The name Saul better suits the etymology in 1 Sam. 1:20 than the name Samuel.

³⁹Cf. the following quotation in which it is clear that Jacob Licht regards the Moabite Ruth as the problem. "It [the book of Ruth] endeavors to show how the apparently reprehensible female ancestor has been absorbed into the thoroughly respectable family of Boaz in a perfectly proper way, and for irreproachable reasons." Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, Jerusalem, 1978, 125.

We must dwell briefly on the fact that the story of Ruth does not have the David ideology as its basic premise. On the contrary, the account of Ruth and Boaz is created at a point when the ambitions of David's family are exposed to vehement criticism, and his supporters therefore need to turn the most vulnerable points in his family history into something positive. Thus it is not the family link to David that legitimizes Ruth, but rather Yahweh's blessing of Ruth's struggle to survive that gives the fragile dynasty the legitimization it so desperately needs.

It must further be emphasized that the story of Ruth has not been supplemented with a genealogy, as many scholars believe. The genealogy is in fact its basic premise and starting point. Admittedly the genealogy is a problem, but within the very problem lies the solution. It simply requires that Ruth be read intertextually, i.e. in the light of—among others—the Tamar narrative. Through his story of the Moabite Ruth the author creates a new story about how God has chosen David's ancestresses—not just Ruth, but before her Tamar, Rachel, and Leah. By depicting the choice of Ruth as a variation on the election of Tamar and her son Perez, and by adapting Perez's genealogy so that David becomes the tenth branch on the trunk, the author creates a new patriarchal story. Just as God chose Tamar to be the ancestress of both Boaz and David, so it is God himself who has chosen David's Moabite ancestress, Ruth, and therefore David himself is chosen!⁴³ This is where the story of Ruth must convince its contemporary audience. And a possible time for such a presentation is the period around the division of the kingdom.

The crucial point, however, is not whether the arguments for this dating are stronger than those for another situation where the dynasty needed a defense. As we know, the only written source for the early monarchy is the biblical texts, so we must be very reticent in concluding actual history from biblical narrative. But we can use the accounts in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings to sketch out typical political situations when it would be meaningful to form the history of David's family, as is the case with the story of Ruth and Boaz. Put another way, we can point to a possible intertextuality which may be a productive background for the creation of the text that we know today as the book of Ruth.

It follows that by including a further group of Old Testament texts in the framework for understanding Ruth we are able to specify the author's purpose with the book, which we can summarize as follows:

To tell of the election of Ruth and thus of the family of David in such a way

⁴³It would be amusing to know more about the stories that women have told through the ages to glorify their ancestresses. How would Bathsheba have told the story of David's family as she sat in the women's house—she who herself was regarded as a foreign woman, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

about looking after his own house fits in well as part of a campaign against Rehoboam. His house, the family of David, is not worth having a share in. If the tribe of Judah stands by him, then that is its problem.

In Ruth there is no attempt to hide David's membership in the tribe of Judah through Boaz. But it is characteristic that the book skirts round the division into tribes and appeals to the patriarchal traditions in its argument. It is the same God who chose the patriarchs, who now stands behind David and his house. This can be seen as an attempt to oppose the split that Jeroboam's policy had created in favor of a common Israelite people under the leadership of David's family. That the book seeks to appeal to all tribes is perhaps best seen in its final scene where the women speak of Obed as being renowned not just in Bethlehem.

Moreover in 1 Kings 11:26ff. we see how the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh announces to Jeroboam that Yahweh has chosen him to be leader of the ten tribes after Solomon's death. Even though the Deuteronomists in the main condemn Jeroboam, they nevertheless pass on some of the traditions that must have belonged in the circle around him and his court. Thus the traditions concerning "the division of the kingdom" show that there were powerful figures speaking up for Jeroboam and not for the Davidic dynasty.⁴¹ Yahweh's choice of Jeroboam meant at the same time a promotion of Joseph. Like the prophet Samuel Jeroboam was an Ephraimite and thus belonged to the tribe of Joseph (1 Kings 11:26). A similar raising of Joseph's status in relation to Judah is known from the Genesis traditions, where he is depicted as a chaste man, in contrast to Judah, who committed incest with his own daughter-in-law (Genesis 38–39).

Finally, the portrayal of Rehoboam's journey to the ancient shrine at Shechem, where he apparently had to agree to negotiate in relation to the northern tribes, proves that the position of David's family was not a matter of course.

A comparison of the versions of the Deuteronomists and the chroniclers shows the degree to which the chroniclers allow themselves a theological arrangement of the material. Almost everything that can belittle the hero David is omitted, though not Judah and Perez's genealogy (1 Chron. 2:3ff). This points either to certain realities being incontrovertible, or to David's family relations being no longer seen as damaging but—on the contrary—a sign of election, just as Ruth maintains. This would fit in well with the glorification of David that the chroniclers presented.⁴²

⁴¹Robert L. Hubbard believes that Ruth cannot be dated to the period of Jeroboam's seizure of power precisely because no writer would dare to write directly against the Yahweh oracle. See Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 42–43. This view is not tenable, however; the Deuteronomists clearly maintain both traditions.

⁴²In his analysis of the genealogies in 1 Chron. 1–9 Manfred Oeming has shown how that of Judah is structured around that of David. See Manfred Oeming, *Das Wahre Israel: Die "genealogische Vorhalle" 1 Chr. 1–9*, Stuttgart, 1990, 100–130.

as to make Ruth's story a reinterpretation of how God in his time elected the patriarchs.

The book then becomes a defense of this family's claim to the royal throne.

Dating

There used to be a widespread understanding that Ruth was written in the postexilic period as a contribution to the disputes about mixed marriages. The story of an Israelite's marriage to a Moabite would recommend a milder practice than that which comes to light in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁴⁴

More recent scholarship rejects this view, one of the main reasons being that David plays a far greater role than such a dating permits. Most recent interpretations therefore agree that the book in some way has David and his family as its purpose and must therefore be dated to the preexilic period. Murray D. Gow⁴⁵ believes that Ruth was written actually during David's reign, where it served to defend his Moabite origins. Against this it can be argued that a defense of his right to the throne does not necessarily have to be written during his reign. Also during the reign of his successor, Solomon, Ruth would be an influential book in support of the Davidic dynasty.⁴⁶

Arguments for dating Ruth must rest partly on an evaluation of the book itself, partly on the Old Testament depiction of the monarchy and the struggle for the throne. Consequently the disputes that led to the dissolution of the community between the tribes in the north and south must also be taken into consideration as a possible intertextuality for the book. Its legitimizing of David's right to the throne shares the same traditions found in 1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 5.⁴⁷ Both accounts purport to defend David's right above all tribes, and it is therefore also probable that they too have come into being around the same time, shortly after Solomon's death and the break between the northern and southern tribes.

Also the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah⁴⁸ have been suggested, since both kings showed an interest in incorporating the northern tribes into their king-

⁴⁴Cf. the survey in Jean-Luc Vesco, "La Date du Livre de Ruth," *RB* 74 (1967): 235–47, and Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 183.

⁴⁵In his epilogue, 207–10, Murray D. Gow (*Book of Ruth*) even ventures the thought experiment that the author is David's prophet, Nathan!

⁴⁶Thus Campbell, *Ruth*, 28, suggests that the book was orally produced under Solomon and written down in the 9th century B.C. See also Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 46, who points to the reign of Solomon as after all the most likely date of composition.

⁴⁷Jakob Grønbaek dates the story of David's path to the throne to the time of Rehoboam, in other words shortly after the division of the kingdom. Jakob Grønbaek, *Die Geschichte vom Aufstieg Davids (1 Sam. 15–II Sam. 5) Tradition und Komposition*, Copenhagen, 1971, 277.

⁴⁸Both possibilities are seriously considered by Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 201–2, but finally rejected. However, Sasson, *Ruth*, 250–52, supports the reign of Josiah with its glorification of David, a period when he believes 1 and 2 Samuel were also written.

Introduction

doms and therefore may very well have needed the story of Ruth to coin date the Davidic dynasty.

Among those scholars who still support a postexilic date is Christian F. Zenger, whose motive is the outward/homeward journey that fits in well with the experience.⁴⁹ An even later date is given by Erich Zenger,⁵⁰ who thinks the final version of the book belongs in the second century B.C.E. Zenger defines its messianic aspect and sees it as promoting the Hasmoneans' political and religious ambitions.

It would therefore seem that much current scholarship regards the date of the Davidic dynasty as the key to understanding the book's purpose thus as a means to dating it. The majority prefer a preexilic date, but agree ends there.⁵¹

The difficulty of dating Ruth is due not only to the large number of political situations that could give rise to a defense of the Davidic claim but also the book's very form and content. Several scholars have tried to date it on the basis of language, style, environment, theology, and legal usage. But the arguments have proved to be untenable.⁵² Attempts to prove a later date, based on certain Aramaisms or an archaic style or current legal usage, have stumbled, and recent research generally agrees on a preexilic date.

Finally, it needs to be emphasized that even though all scholars do not agree on a date, there is a widespread understanding that the author is to be found within the royal court. The court provided not only the essential financial sources but also the environment that could produce an artist of the caliber of Ruth's author.

6. Theological Themes

The discovery that Ruth was originally written to champion the right of David's family to the throne does not of course exhaust the significance of the book. The effect that it had testifies to its having been read in many other situations than political power struggles. Like all works of art it is not a book with a single message for a limited time and circumstance but belongs in a network of texts that each underline particular themes in the narrative.

The book contains very few statements that could be construed as theological. Only twice does it mention God as intervening. In 1:6 Naomi has

⁴⁹Christian Frevel, *Das Buch Ruth*, 1992, 34.

⁵⁰Zenger, *Das Buch Ruth*, 28.

⁵¹Cf. Susan Niditch, "Legends of Wise Heroes and Heroines, II. Ruth," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Douglas A. Knight, Gene M. Tucker, Philadelphia, 1985, 2.

⁵²For a thorough treatment of the arguments for and against both a pre-exilic and a post-exilic dating see Sasson, *Ruth*, 240–52; Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 183–206, and Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 23–35.

that God looks after his people and feeds them. And in connection with Ruth's marriage we hear that Yahweh "enabled her to conceive" (4:13). But with these two verses the author also characterizes the chief feature in the book's image of God: Yahweh provides bread and babies. In this way the theology corresponds precisely to the plot, where famine and childlessness are overcome through Ruth's marriage to Boaz and the birth of the desired son.

In one other place the author makes it clear that God is behind events, when of all the fields available for gleaning Ruth "found herself working" in Boaz's field. Just as Naomi has only heard—but not yet experienced—that God has looked after his people, so it is with the meeting in the field: one senses but does not see a divine hand. If we compare Ruth with the patriarchal narratives, it is also noteworthy that God is silent. Nowhere in the book does God speak to man or woman. Nor is there a direct meeting with God—no dreams, no angels.

The fact that we can still speak of Yahweh playing a central role in the book⁵³ is due to the position he assumes in the dialogues. The sheer number of times he is mentioned (1:8–9, 13, 17, 20–21; 2:12, 19–20; 3:13; 4:11–12, 14) creates an awareness of his never-failing presence, whether it be disaster striking, or dearth turning to wealth. The book can thus be read as homage to the God who performs his will despite all obstacles.

However, it is not only the use of the name of Yahweh that witnesses to his presence. One of the fundamental motifs is Yahweh's care for people in need. Even though Elimelech's family was dying out at one point, it was this very family that was chosen to become the family of David. God's election and guidance of the patriarchs is repeated. And it is also this care that Naomi and Boaz appeal to when they ask for God's blessing.

Characteristic of both Naomi and Boaz's prayers is that they regard the blessing as God's natural response to human faithfulness and goodness. Naomi prays that Yahweh will give her daughters-in-law security in a marriage (1:8–9) and that Yahweh will bless Boaz (2:19–20). In both cases the goodness and faithfulness of the recipients are referred to. Boaz too prays that Yahweh will reward Ruth for her faithfulness to his people and will bless her (2:12; 3:10).

The theology of the book of Ruth finds expression not only in the prayers but also in their fulfillment. Chapter 4 can thus be read as a fulfillment of Naomi and Boaz's prayers as well as the witnesses' prayers for fertility and procreation for both Ruth and Boaz. All three parties are rewarded with what they have prayed for when Boaz marries Ruth and Yahweh enables her to conceive and bear a son. Precisely the mention of Yahweh's name in connection with the prayers serves to create tension in the book. For sooner or later Yahweh will without doubt fulfill these prayers; yet how will this come about?

⁵³See Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 67.

God guides and controls events, but from beneath the surface. For on surface itself the main characters live and move and try to form their existence as best they can. However, it is worth noticing that their plans are never fully coordinated. Ruth's wish to follow Naomi is in direct contradiction of Naomi's advice. And Naomi's passivity on her return to Bethlehem is countered by Ruth's initiative in providing food. When Naomi plans the meeting at the threshing floor, Ruth agrees to obey her, yet still she does what she sees Boaz also accepts when Ruth asks for marriage; but he must take a detour before Ruth's plan can become Boaz's plan and in the end come to fruition.

Perhaps the most important point in this context is that Boaz and Naomi never meet and make plans together. According to the norms of the time would otherwise have been natural for the two older family members to get together and plan the future of their families. But that does not happen. Each of them thinks their own thoughts, and out of all these individual plans grows a unity that leads the reader to sense that in this way God's plan is being carried out. With a fine irony, however, the author shows that the main characters do not themselves know about this interaction between divine guidance and human action.

The most refined example of this hidden interplay between human action and God's control is in chapters 2–3, where Boaz prays that Ruth may receive her full reward from the God of Israel under whose wings she has sought shelter. Little does he know that Ruth will shortly ask *him* for shelter under his own "wings" (cf. the wordplay on wings and the corner of Boaz's garment in 2:12 and 3:9). It soon turns out that it is Boaz himself who is to fulfill his own prayer for Ruth, for thus will the God of Israel show his faithfulness toward the family of Elimelech.

Through prayer the belief is expressed that Yahweh will reward human faithfulness and goodness, *hesed*, by showing his own *hesed*. The portrayal of God is marked by a clear expectation that Yahweh, who has made a pact with the patriarchs to lead and protect them, will continue to live up to his commitment as the God of the covenant. That is precisely why Naomi formulates her complaint as an accusation against the Almighty who has struck her down with such unreasonable force (1:20–21).

The concept of *hesed* constitutes a significant theme. In Ruth it does not denote the expectation of measure for measure to be found in the wisdom literature, but the extraordinary kindness that Ruth and Boaz offer to a family member in need. It requires courage to exceed expectations and break norms, but both are rewarded in the end. The demonstration that *hesed* can require a person to choose the unexpected and not just be satisfied with what the law declares also means that the women in the narrative occupy a special place.

Naomi's plan for a meeting at the threshing floor and Ruth's execution of the plan are the book's central initiative. The women break contemporar

norms and are rewarded for doing just that. Thus God is presented as being on the side of the marginalized, conducting their case even where the law is inadequate and they must resort to trickery to gain justice.

Read as continuation of the final chapters of Deuteronomy, Ruth is clearly a contrasting text. Whereas the women in Judges 19–21 are exposed to violence and attack, and no God intervenes to help them, Ruth presents two women who despite loss and hardship are part of Yahweh's redemptive plan—as more than passive victims. Naomi does not accept in silence what the Almighty has done to her, but gives voice to her anguish and forms it as a charge. She makes plans for the future and puts them into practice. Nor does Ruth succumb to a hopeless future, but dares with all her might to carry on the family which she had bound herself to through marriage to Mahlon.

This contrast between Judges 19–21 and the book of Ruth also underlines how the latter makes its contribution to the stories of women in the Old Testament. Ruth is in dialogue with other women's destinies, most notably those of Lot's daughters, Tamar, Rachel, and Leah. But the stories of Sarai and Hagar, Rebekah and Hannah are also part of this network. Ruth thus lends her name to a story that offers a future to the marginalized, for she is elected to be the ancestress of one of Israel's leaders.

Ruth dates the events to the period of the Judges and the transition from a form of government that can be characterized as lawless because it was kingless (Judg. 21:25) to a government that through most of the Old Testament is regarded as the ideal, namely monarchy. We can see how the author establishes this transition in the form of a repetition of the patriarchal years, when the people lived under Yahweh's guidance and promise that they would become a great nation and own much land. Such a theme must have found a sympathetic response in situations where fellowship between the tribes was at a crisis, as well as during the exile when hopes of returning home and starting a new life were intense. During the exile it would have been a great comfort to hear how despite great loss and hardship Elimelech's family left their "exile" in Moab and returned home to Judah. Ruth would have given the exiles the confidence that Yahweh was still fulfilling the prayers that people prayed and was still in control of events.

As a liturgical text at the Festival of Weeks there is another theme in Ruth that comes to the fore: her conversion. Just as Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, so Ruth also returns home when she chooses Naomi's land, people, and God. Her true home is the Israelite-Jewish community, for whom she becomes a shining example of the foreigner who as a proselyte undertakes to live as the God of Israel requires.

Many scholars have rightly emphasized this decision of a foreigner to join the Israelite-Jewish community, seeing in it a link between Ruth and other Old Testament texts that present God as God of the whole world, such as the book

of Jonah.⁵⁴ Seen from this intertextual angle the conversion motif and God's goodness to foreign peoples are clearly present. That this perspective is a part of the image of God found in the patriarchal narratives is clear from words to Abram in Gen. 12:1–3, where Abram is not only himself blessed, where the culmination is reached in the promise: "... all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." From a messianic point of view these words could just as well apply to David's ancestress, Ruth.

7. The Text

In language and style Ruth reminds us of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. Only in a few places does the language diverge from classical Hebrew 3:3 an old feminine form is used in the 2d pers. sing., and there are a number of examples of the use of an old feminine dual suffix.⁵⁵ The use of the so-called "paragogic nun" is likewise often regarded as expressing an old, possibly chaotic style.⁵⁶ Conversely, some scholars have alleged a number of Aramaicisms that would point to a later date for composition.⁵⁷ (For a discussion of the date of the book see p. 29.)

Ruth is both well-written and well-preserved. The only textual emendments required are in 4:4, 5, 21. In a few places a decision must be made whether to read the consonant text (ketib) or the vowel text (qere), namely 2:1, 3:9, 14; 4:5. A particular problem is raised by 4:4–5, where the choice of the textual basis is of crucial importance for a unified interpretation.

With the discovery of the Qumran texts it became possible to follow textual developments in the book several centuries back in time.⁵⁸ The variations in the Qumran version are extremely limited, however, and have no bearing on the interpretation of Ruth.

The Septuagint

Most important among the old translations of Ruth is the LXX.⁵⁹ This is a very literal translation, which shows that the translator has a good knowledge

⁵⁴Cf. Sasson, *Ruth*, 246–47.

⁵⁵A few scholars believe that this is a masculine plural suffix being used of women. In favor of the feminine dual suffix, however, is that in all seven places the form is used in connection with two women: 1:8 (twice), 9, 11, 13, 19; 4:11. For a discussion see Campbell, *Ruth*, 65.

⁵⁶Found in 2:8, 21, and 3:4, 18. Cf. *ibid.*, 97.

⁵⁷Cf. the rejection of this argument in Campbell, *Ruth*, 24–26 and Sasson, *Ruth*, 244–46.

⁵⁸See Campbell, *Ruth*, 40–41, who discusses the most important variants. See also Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 2–3.

⁵⁹For further discussion of the origin of the LXX see Campbell, *Ruth*, 36–40; Sasson, *Ruth*, 9–10; and Beattie, *Jewish Exegesis*, 9–10.