

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
NEW YORK SCHOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESIS

AUTHOR: Elizabeth W. Goldstein.  
TITLE: The Question of Date in the Book  
of Ruth

TYPE OF THESIS:

RABBINIC (✓)

SSM ( )

D.H.L. ( )

D.MIN. ( )

M.A.R.E. ( )

M.A.J.S. ( )

1. ☒ May be used without my written permission.
2. ☒ My written permission is required for use during the next 10 years.

Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses for a period of no more than ten years.

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis.

☒ yes ☐ no

3/1/01  
Date

Elizabeth W. Goldstein  
Signature of Author

THE KLAU LIBRARY HEBREW UNION COLLEGE JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION BROOKDALE CENTER ONE WEST FOURTH STREET NEW YORK, NY 10012	<u>LIBRARY RECORD</u> Microfilmed: _____ Date: _____ Signature of Library Staff Member: _____
--	--

**The Question of Date in the Book of Ruth**

**Elizabeth Goldstein**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinic Program  
New York, New York**

**March 1, 2000  
Advisor: Dr. S. D. Sperling**

Elizabeth Goldstein

### "The Question of Date in the Book of Ruth"

The objectives of my rabbinic thesis are to summarize and assess the arguments scholars offer for the date of the Book of Ruth. The first chapter examines whether the date of Ruth can be found based on its place in the canon. This discussion is further complicated by the fact that the Hebrew Bible places Ruth in the Writings while the Septuagint, followed by the Christian Bible, places Ruth after the Book of Judges. The second chapter is a study of three major themes in the book, levirate marriage, Moab, and the issue of foreign woman. Although numerous arguments for the date of Ruth are founded on these themes, this chapter attempts an objective textual analysis. Secondary scholarship is primarily consulted for the section on levirate marriage. The third chapter compares linguistic evidence for dating the book. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the role of the tribe of Judah in the book. Whether the genealogy has an impact on date is the main focus of this chapter. Lastly, I thought it important to summarize the arguments of major scholars and to review their final positions on the date of the book. These final positions are the contents of the fifth chapter.

I conclude that the Book of Ruth was written during the Second Temple period. The purpose of the book was most likely a protest against Ezra's and Nehemia's prohibition against foreign wives.

*This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents,  
all of whom have passed away during my years in rabbinical school.  
I feel their pride and their love even though they are no longer physically here.*

*James Ginsberg*

*Sylvia Ginsberg*

*Julius Goldstein*

*Ann Goldstein*

*יהיו זכרונם לברכה  
May their memories be for blessing.*

## Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. S.D. Sperling, for his encouragement and his faith in my thesis process. Our conversations consistently remind me of the vast world of biblical scholarship and how much more there is to know. I look forward to future collaboration. I would also like to thank Rabbi Andrea Weiss for her guidance and feedback. For their generous support of my future academic goals, I am appreciative of the support of Dr. Norman Cohen and Dean Aaron Panken. Also at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I would like to acknowledge the ongoing academic support and general guidance of my advisor, Rabbi Dr. Nancy Wiener. I am also blessed to have wonderful friends, hevrutot, and classmates. You have made this experience the joy that it has been. I will miss you terribly, but anxiously await being your colleagues. My experience as a student at HUC-JIR has been wonderful preparation for leadership in the American Jewish community. In my last semester I become more and more aware of the gift of the New York school.

My research was done primarily during the summer of 2000 in Jerusalem. While there, I also consulted with Dr. Ilana Pardes. I am grateful for her feedback and her recommendation of Amos Funkenstein's work. I would like to thank Rabbi Dr. Sarra Levine for our conversations during that summer and Rabbi Rochelle Robbins for her support of my endeavor.

I have spent almost as much time in Morristown as I have in New York in the last two years. My internship at Temple B'nai Or, under the mentorship of Rabbi Donald B. Rossoff, has been the foundation for some of my most important learning. To all of my students in Morristown, young, old and mostly in-between, thank you for allowing me to be your teacher. I feel blessed by your faith in me. Thank you, Don, for your encouragement of my personal goals. You have shown me the power of quiet leadership and the strength of sharing it.

I would like to thank my family. My parents have never been less than 100% behind every important decision I have ever made. I am indeed lucky to be their daughter. My sister, Stephanie, has also encouraged me to fulfill my dreams, even as her dreams have led her on such different paths. I would like to thank my in-laws, Jonathan and Sarah Malino, for sharing their excitement for academic discoveries with me and for their continued support of my academic career. To Tamar, my wonderful spouse, rabbinical school has been our joint journey. Thank you for always encouraging me to do my very best. You are my most valued colleague and friend.

Thank you, God  
for hearing my voice whenever I call upon you.  
I pray you will continue to be with me  
on the road ahead  
and always.  
ברוך אתה יי שומע תפילה.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The Relationship of Date to Canonicity.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Themes in the Book.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Date Based on Language.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter 4: The Tribe of Judah in the Book of Ruth.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Chapter 5: The Final Positions.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>76</b>

## **Introduction**

Assigning a date to the Book of Ruth has been a major project for scholars in the past century. Scholars thought the book was late because of its language and because it seemed to be a protest against Ezra's prohibition against foreign wives. In the last few decades, more and more scholars have thought that the book is a product of the 10th century. This new school looks to the Solomonic era for Ruth's author. Some have claimed a date closer to the 8th century. It is the position of this paper that the early scholars were closer to the right date. However, a serious attempt has been made to articulate the arguments for both an early and a late date.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first four chapters explore different arguments by which scholars have tried to date the Book of Ruth. The first chapter examines whether the date of Ruth can be found based on its place in the canon. This discussion is further complicated by the fact that the Hebrew Bible places Ruth in the Writings while the Septuagint, followed by the Christian Bible, places Ruth after the Book of Judges. The second chapter is a study of three major themes in the book, levirate marriage, Moab, and the issue of foreign woman. Although numerous arguments for the date of Ruth are founded on these themes, this chapter attempts an objective textual analysis. Secondary scholarship is primarily consulted for the section on levirate marriage. The third chapter compares linguistic evidence for dating the book. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the role of the tribe of Judah in the book. Whether the genealogy has an impact on date is the main focus of this chapter. Lastly, I thought it

important to summarize the arguments of major scholars and to review their final positions on the date of the book. These final positions are the contents of the fifth chapter. The conclusion contains my own final thoughts on the date of the Book of Ruth.



## Chapter 1

### The Relationship of Dating to Canonicity

At the beginning of most commentaries on the Book of Ruth, one will most certainly find a short section on the place of the book in the canon. In some commentaries the section on canon precedes the general discussion of date and composition<sup>1</sup> while others place it after the section on dating.<sup>2</sup> In some works the sections on date and canon are along side each other while in others they are separated by discussions of methodology, literary criticism, or inter-textual issues.<sup>3</sup> The issue of canon is integral to the question of date but every commentator does not note this connection. Specifically, those who date the Book of Ruth early must account for its inclusion in the Hebrew Bible, at least, in the Writings. This fact, as well as others, will be discussed in this section. Our study should begin with a closer look at the place of the Book of Ruth in the canon.

One of Y. Zakovitch's central arguments for dating the Book of Ruth after the Babylonian exile is his belief that the Joshua-Kings narrative was closed by the time of

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. II, Introduction to the Book of Ruth by L.P. Smith and exposition by J.T. Cleland, (New York: Abingdon Press) 1953, 829-30. Also Robert L. Hubbard Jr. *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdman's Publishing Co.) 1988, 4-7 and 23-30 and Kirsten Nielson, *Ruth: A Commentary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 1997, 19-21 and 28-29.

<sup>2</sup> See commentary of Katrina J.A. Larkin, *Ruth and Esther*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 1996, 18-25 and 31-35. The discussion of canon is placed after that of date in the following commentary as well. E. John Hamlin, *Surely There is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdman's Publishing Co.), 1996, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Hamlin, for example, places the sections one after the other while Nielson discusses literary theory and other issues, before returning to the question of date. Of course, the agenda, focus and perspective of the two works are very different. Here, I am merely showing examples of how date and canon are related in different commentaries.

the writing of Ruth. Sanders and Friedman argue that Genesis through Kings was a complete collection by the year 586 B.C.E.<sup>4</sup> Zakovitch argues that Ruth must have been written before or during the time of the Deuteronomistic histories. If not, the book would have been included in the Early Prophets, especially since it is set in the period of the judges.<sup>5</sup> The setting of the Book of Ruth in this period is evidenced by the Septuagint, which places the Book of Ruth after the Book of Judges. Most scholars do not believe this to be the original placement of the book. The books of the Writings were translated into Greek after the Pentateuch and Prophets. This process of translation did not begin until the third century B.C.E.<sup>6</sup> However, even the Hebrew scriptural tradition of "the Writings" did not begin until around the first century of the common era. Both the Greek and Hebrew traditions are late and can only tell us about the agenda of their compilers.

What can be ascertained is that it would be more logical to move a book from the Writings to the prophetic collection. Larkin is in agreement with this position based on the natural inclination to move a book that is set in the period of the judges to the actual Book of Judges. According to L.P. Smith, the Septuagint disregarded the distinction between the Prophets and the Writings. He asserted that the Book of Ruth was placed with Judges and Jeremiah was placed with Lamentations for thematic reasons.<sup>7</sup> Sanders writes that there is no tripartite division at all in the Greek First

---

<sup>4</sup> J.A. Sanders, "Canon," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. by D.N. Freedman, (New York: Doubleday), 1992, p. 840. See also D.N. Freedman, "Canon of the OT" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary volume*, ed. by K. Crim, (Nashville: Abingdon), 1976, p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> Yair Zakovitch, *Miqra L'Yisrael: Rut*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press), 1990, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Discussion with Dr. Martin Cohen, October, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, 829.

Testament. According to Sanders this would suggest "that such a division after the Pentateuch was either not yet known, or more likely, not full of canonical status by the time of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the break of Christianity from Judaism."<sup>8</sup> Sanders does admit there could be a polemical reason for the Septuagint's blurring of what we know as the Prophets and the Writings, but feels none has been advanced.

It is very different to say that the Septuagint disregarded the distinction between the Prophets and the Writings than to say there was no set tradition about the ordering of the books after the Pentateuch. The question is really that which Larkin raises in the introduction to her commentary. "The question arises as to whether the Septuagint continues a tradition that was originally Jewish (Gerleman) or whether the placing of Ruth in the Hebrew canon should be regarded as the original (Rudolph)."<sup>9</sup> Larkin weighs three main pieces of evidence before she concludes that the text probably was not originally placed in the Prophets. They are the Babylonian Talmud, the Church Fathers and Josephus, and the Apocryphal Book of 4 Esdras.

The tractate of Talmud that she and others quote on the issue of canon is Baba Batra 14b. "The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the Book of Psalms, Job, Prophets, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles."<sup>10</sup> The prior statement begins, "The Rabbis taught" which usually indicates a *braitta*. A *braitta* is tannaitic and would date from the beginning to end of the second

---

<sup>8</sup> Sanders, 841.

<sup>9</sup> Larkin, 33. She cites the following two scholars: G. Gerleman, *Ruth* (BK, 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag), 1965 and W. Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth* (KAT, 17.1; Gutersloh: Mohn,) 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1962.

<sup>10</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin*, (London: Soncino Press) 1935, 70-71.

century. Whether or not the above statement is intended to be a continuation of the *braitta's* statement should be considered. If the statement is a not a *braitta*, its date could be one or more centuries later. According to the Munich manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud the statement is preceded by a separate "The Rabbis taught," thus indicating it is a *braitta*. This textual variant suggests that Talmud's list of the Hagiographic books is not later than the end of the second century.

The next piece of evidence from the around the first century is 4 Esdras 14:44-46 which also affirms a twenty-four book canon with Ruth placed first in the Writings.<sup>11</sup> It seems clear that Ruth was moved from the beginning of the Writings to its place in the current Hebrew Scripture to coincide with the festival upon which it is read publicly. It has also been said that Ruth was placed first according to the Talmud passage for chronological reasons. Ruth is first because her story occurs during the period of the judges. The Psalms follow Ruth because they are supposedly written by King David. If the rabbis were concerned about chronology, one might ask why they did not move the Book of Ruth to follow The Book of Judges, as did the Septuagint. The fact that they did not move the book needs to be further explored. It could be that they felt that the collection of early prophetic writings was closed to new entries (cf. Zakovitch).

Larkin's third piece of evidence, supporting the Septuagint's order as original, are the writings of the Church Fathers, Origen, Jerome, and Melito. They believed the

---

<sup>11</sup> 4 Esdras is the Vulgate name that refers to the same book as the Apocrypha 2 Esdras. In addition "chapters 3-14 are a Jewish apocalyptic work from late in the first century in the Common Era." (ABD, vol. II, p.732)

canon was made up of 22 books. She also notes the famous passage for canonical studies in Josephus' work, *Against Apion*, in which he refers to a twenty-two-book tradition.<sup>12</sup> The assumption is that Ruth and Judges are together and Jeremiah and Lamentations are together. The Church fathers can most likely be dated to the third century but the Josephus passage (I. 37-42), written in the first century, attests to the Greek tradition. Larkin, I believe, rightly assumes the combined evidence of the Talmud and Esdras carry more weight than the Church Fathers and Josephus, but there is no way to be sure. It should be noted though, that those who date the book early, do not rely heavily on the book's placement in the Septuagint.

Some commentators see the question of canon as entirely separate from that of date. For example, Hamlin only discusses canon to the extent of saying there are two traditions, both of which serve the purposes of two different communities. He claims that the book's placement in the Writings serves to center the Ruth story in the Jewish seasonal cycle of *megillot* while the placement in the prophets serves the Christian community's need to see David as the link to the future messiah. Hamlin suggests that the Christians have followed the placement of the LXX for the above reason. He writes, "the editors understood it as a part of Israel's sacred history from Abraham to the fall of Jerusalem." He also proposes that further comparisons were intended by placing the story near that of Rahab in Joshua, Judges 19-21, and the song of Hannah in I Samuel 2:1-10. By the time Hamlin discusses canon he has already claimed an early

---

Also, dating the work to the first century is W. O. E. Oesterly in *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha*, (London: Society for the Promoting of Christian Knowledge), 1937, 155.

<sup>12</sup>*Against Apion*, Josephus, with an English translation by H. St. J. Thackeray, M.A. in Eight Volumes, Vol. 1, (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1926, 179.

date for the Book of Ruth. Zakovitch's question doesn't bother him. Perhaps, he is so influenced by the Christian canonical structure that the thought of the early prophetic collection closing is obscured. Or, perhaps, Hamlin believes that the placement of biblical books after the Pentateuch is flexible until the first and second centuries.

The connections between the Books of Ruth and Judges are numerous. There are thematic connections, as well as the obvious connection between Ruth's first verse and the period of the judges. We know that Biblical writers had a tradition of writing in the voice of a mythical ancestor, like Moses, in the Book of Deuteronomy or the Book of Jubilees. We cannot assume that because the Book of Ruth is placed in the period of the judges it was written during that time. The Book of Ruth sets itself after this period, "And in the days when the judges judged" (Ruth 1:1). In addition, the first time "judge" is used to convey an office in the Bible is in Deuteronomy 16:18. Deuteronomy 19:17 suggests there was a period of judges. The actual "judges" didn't necessarily see themselves as judges. It has been suggested that the judges were in fact early kings, but were not referred to as such by later biblical writers.<sup>13</sup> Abimelech is referred to as a king in addition to the obvious connection to kingship his own name. Although the word "king" is not used with regard to Jephtah, the role of king and military leader is surely implied (Jud. 11:11). This is not to suggest that every leader in the book of Judges is really a king, only that calling them "judges" is a later phenomenon and part of the myth that Saul was the first true Israelite king. M. Brettler agrees that the Book of Judges was written much later than the actual period of the judges. He suggests that because the judges are often seen as anti-heroes in the biblical text, there is a Southern

agenda present in the editing of the work. Brettler asserts that one of the primary underlying currents of the Book of Judges is a critique and mockery (as in the Shibboleth scene in Jud. 12:6) of the northern kingship.<sup>14</sup>

The writer of the Book of the Ruth chooses the term "judges" to convey a sense of nostalgia he or she knew would be familiar to the biblical audience. Thematically, the books of Ruth and Judges co-exist well together. Consider the connection between the books regarding the treatment of wayfarers. Judges 19-21 is one of the most stark pictures of how foreigners are treated and especially women. The Book of Ruth, while not a perfect picture of the ancient Israelite woman, certainly presents a brighter outlook on the treatment of women by the Israelite community.

Larkin thinks this contrasts might be a reason why Ruth was 'promoted to the prophets.'<sup>15</sup> Thematically, both stories have a connection with Bethlehem in Judah, but the events described are contrary pictures of hospitality. In each case travelers require hospitality. In Ruth, travelers are treated generously while in Judges they are viciously abused. Ruth's story leads to the continuation of a family line ending with David. As a result of the breakdown of law, the Judges story tells of the whole tribe of Benjamin in danger of extinction.<sup>16</sup>

There is another reason why the Book of Ruth might have been placed next to the Book of Judges. Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin and the Book of Ruth presents David's family in a perfect light. Next to the Book of Judges, the Book of Ruth works

---

<sup>13</sup> This was discussed in M. Smith's class in "Israelite Religion" at New York University in October, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> M. Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108/3 (1989) 395-418.

<sup>15</sup> Larkin, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Larkin, 34.

well as an anti-Saul polemic. Whether the purpose of the book is indeed an anti-Saul polemic or not will be discussed in future chapters. There are two canonical traditions. Without commenting on Zakovitch's point about date, it makes more sense to move a "late" Book of Ruth to an earlier collection based on theme.

The canon question can only take us so far in our search for the date of the Book of Ruth. We can speculate about the different choices made by those who lived in antiquity concerning the placement of the book. We can accept Zakovitch's question as a valid one, although we may remain skeptical that the early prophetic collection was closed by the exilic period. Ultimately, though, the search for date must continue outside the exploration of canon.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Themes in the Book**

In the last chapter, we determined that the placement of the Book of Ruth in the Septuagint is not proof that the story was written in the time of the Judges. We concluded that whether Ruth was originally placed in the Prophets or in the Writings had almost no bearing on the question of date. Zakovitch's concern regarding the closing of the "Genesis through Kings" narrative remains valid and will be considered in conclusion. In this chapter, we will examine general themes in the book by exploring the following questions: How is the nation of Moab portrayed in the book? In which period would this portrayal indicate that a book like Ruth could be written? How is the term נכריה (Ruth 2:10) to be understood in the context of the greater Hebrew Bible? How is the issue of levirate marriage understood in the story and what are its implications for dating the book?

#### *Levirate Marriage*

Before the scene at the city gate occurs in chapter 4, there is already an allusion in chapter 1 to the possibility that levirate marriage can repair the desperate situation of the young widows, Ruth and Orpah. "But Naomi said, 'Return, my daughters, Why would you go with me? Are there any more sons within my body that could be husbands for you? Return my daughters, go, for I am too old to conceive; if I said I have hope that even tonight I would conceive and bear sons, would you wait until they have grown?

Would you prevent yourselves from marrying at all? No, my daughters, for I am more bitter than you for the hand of God has gone out against me." (Ruth 1:11-13)<sup>1</sup> Levine cites Beyer as the first to discuss this allusion.<sup>2</sup> Levine explains that "one is reminded of Tamar, patiently waiting for little Shelah to reach maturity (Gen. 38: 11)." Naomi's short monologue serves as a major part of the plot. What is the family going to do? Will they separate or, is there some way to save the family unit? Will the relief be a levirate marriage? The answer is a resounding no. Naomi cannot have more children. If the girls want to have their own children, they must find new husbands. If it was customary for another family member to fulfill the obligation of levirate marriage, why did Naomi fail to suggest this possibility? This is an important question and the answer is relevant to the question of date.

In a two part study E.W. Davies suggests that levirate marriage underwent a three step process in ancient Israel. In the first part of his study he demonstrates that "the right of a widow to inherit the property of her deceased husband was a principle which was generally recognized in the cultures of the ancient Near East."<sup>3</sup> Davies cites Neufeld's 1944 study in which he discusses similar practices among the Babylonians and the

<sup>1</sup>All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>J. A. Beyer, "The גאולה in the Book of Ruth," AJSL 19 (1902-1903) cited by Baruch A. Levine in, "In Praise of the Isaelite משפחה: Legal Themes in the Book of Ruth," in The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall ed. by H.B. Huffman, F.A. Spina and A.R.W. Green (Indiana: Eisenbrauns) 1983.

<sup>3</sup>Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage" Part I, VT, vol.31, no. 2 1981, 137.

Hittites.<sup>4</sup> Davies reads the expression "קרא שם" as not only "gave a name" ( as in Ruth 4:14, 17). He reads the expression as, "to continue the name of the deceased through the rightful inheritance of property." He derives this reading from Deuteronomy 25: 5-10 where the text speaks of levirate marriage. He points specifically to verse 6 which reads "וְהָיָה הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד יִקְוֶה עַל שֵׁם אָחִיו הַמֵּת וְלֹא יִמָּחָה שְׁמוֹ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל"

"And so it shall be that the first born that she bears will raise up the name of his dead brother so that his name will not be wiped out from Israel." Davies comments, "it is clear that word שם in this context was not intended to be taken literally, for neither Tamar nor Ruth actually called their children by the name of their deceased husbands (Gen. 38; Ruth 4:17). Rather, it would appear that the word שם should be here connected with a man's property."<sup>5</sup> Davies cites two other biblical examples as evidence of his claim. He cites Numbers 27:1-11, the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, when the daughters say, 'Why should our father's name (שם אבינו) be taken away from his family because he has no son? Give to us a possession among our brothers' (v.4)<sup>6</sup> To further support his claim, Davies cites M. Noth's comment that the petition of the daughters "presupposes that the 'name' of a man...could be preserved only in association with the inheritance of land by his descendants."<sup>7</sup> The other biblical example Davies brings is 2 Samuel 14:4 ff. when the woman of Tekoa pleads for the life of her son. The woman

<sup>4</sup>E. Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws* (London), 1944, 240.

<sup>5</sup>Davies, vol. 31, no.2, 140.

<sup>6</sup>Davies' translation, 141.

<sup>7</sup>Davies cites Noth in footnote no. 14 on p.141: M. Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose, Numeri* (Göttingen, 1966), p.184 (E. tr. Numbers [London, 1968], p.211).

says that if her son were to die, "her husband would be left with neither name nor remnant upon the face of earth."<sup>8</sup> According to Davies, the widow implies that her husband's kinsmen will inherit his property. Davies raises one additional point from Ruth 4:10.

It is clear from the book of Ruth that the son born of the union between Boaz and Ruth perpetuates the name of the dead by inheriting his land. This is, in fact, made quite explicit in Boaz's statement before the leaders, for he claims that the purpose of the levirate union was "to raise up the name of the dead in his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10). The fact that succession to an estate here occurs within the context of levirate marriage is particularly significant.<sup>9</sup>

Levirate marriage served both to send forth the name of the deceased into the next generation and ensure that the widow would have land and livelihood. According to Davies, levirate marriage functioned this way outside of ancient Israel and, to some extent, inside Israel.

In part II of his article, Davies, having already established the connection between the levir and property rights, examines further implications of performing the levirate duty.<sup>10</sup> Davies illustrates several disadvantages of accepting the duty of the levirate. The first is the likely possibility of losing the land to the son finally born of the union. The second disadvantage is financially sustaining the cost of another wife. Thirdly, as Davies reads Ruth 4:6, the possibility exists of losing some of his own land to the new son. It could be that the nameless redeemer is merely referring to the land he would inherit as a result of levirate marriage. Nevertheless, Davies' reading of Ruth 4:6 is a

<sup>8</sup>Translation Davies.

<sup>9</sup>Davies, 142.

<sup>10</sup>Eryl W. Davies "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage" Part 2, *V7*, vol. 31, no. 3, 257-268.

valid one.

According to Davies, fulfilling the duty of the levirate might also be advantageous. The levirate could exploit the land during the time of his ownership, before it passed to the new heir. Of course, the chance of not having a son also existed. According to Numbers 27:8-11, if there is no son, the property belongs to the daughter, then to his brother, then to his father's brothers, and then to his nearest relative in his own clan (משפחה). Davies suggests that the brother of the deceased might inherit regardless of his decision to marry the widow.<sup>11</sup> However, he cites Rowley who does not believe that a society would reward the man who dishonored his brother.

Rowley claims that the Book of Ruth demonstrates an early trend in levirate marriage, when the specifications of who could perform the duty were flexible. (Therefore a father could perform the duty of the brother.) With this in mind, Rowley claims an early date for the book. Davies criticizes Rowley's view based on his belief that Genesis 38 and the Book of Ruth predate Deut. 25. If this were true, claims Davies, "it is difficult to explain why the levirate obligation is compulsory in one (Gen. 38) and optional in the other (Ruth)."<sup>12</sup> Based on these three biblical texts, Davies sees three stages, rather than Rowley's two stages, of levirate law as practiced in ancient Israel. Levirate marriage was first obligatory, and not limited to a brother, as in the case of Judah. Then the law was restricted by Deuteronomy's concern that property would be

<sup>11</sup> Davies, no.3, 263. H.H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Ruth" *The Servant of the Lord* (Oxford: revised edn.) 1965.

<sup>12</sup> Davies, no.3, 266.

divided and lost so "only brothers dwelling together" (Deut.25:5) could perform levirate marriage. As a result, fewer men performed the act, which affected the widow negatively. The Book of Ruth reflects a third stage when the custom was optional; anyone in the family could perform the ritual, and no stigma was attached to not doing it. A critique of Davies and Rowley is their claim that Gen. 38 reflects the idea that fathers were eligible to perform the duty of the levirate. The fact that Tamar must disguise herself and entrap Judah would suggest that this union was not a common way to fulfill the commandment of levirate marriage.

According to Ruth 1, Naomi seems to understand that levirate marriage is the concept of brothers marrying the widows of brothers. Because of her pleasant surprise when Ruth announces she is going to glean in the field of Boaz, one might think levirate marriage had fallen out of custom or that other distant family members could perform the rite, as Davies implies. Davies is influenced by his very plausible reading of קרא שם in the Ruth story but also in 2 Samuel and in Numbers. However, if one examines the issue of levirate marriage apart from the issue of inheritance, one can see that the Book of Ruth conflates the two issues. B. Levine raises precisely this issue:

...the mere presence of legal detail expressed in technical language, does not prove the applicability of the actual legal instruments referred to in the story. The question that should concern us is whether the circumstances of the story, as the author himself fashioned it, call for those legal actions, or not. We shall have occasion to observe that the author of Ruth was capable of legal leaps, of glossing over the prerequisites for invoking certain Israelite laws, while at the same time exploiting the very dynamics of those laws to enhance the intricacy of his plot.<sup>13</sup>

Levine's article does not respond to Davies directly, rather he responds to the many who

---

<sup>13</sup>Levine, 96.

have tried ascertain the date of the book from the author's knowledge of levirate laws in ancient Israel.<sup>14</sup> Primarily this is difficult because the author confounds the idea of the levirate and the redeemer. As Levine puts it, "his purpose was to extol the spirit, rather than the letter of the Israelite law..."<sup>15</sup> Levine also makes the very essential point that the author of Ruth knew the exact wording of the levirate law in Deuteronomy 25:5-10.<sup>16</sup> It is almost uncanny how the author of Ruth uses the formula in Deuteronomy as part of the scene in Ruth 4:5b, 10. To imagine the opposite, that is, Deuteronomy copying the formula from Ruth, makes little sense. For a legal document to copy a legal formula from a narrative seems unlikely, but the possibility exists.

### *Moab*

The theme of "the foreigner" plays an important role in the Book of Ruth. Both the symbol of the land of Moab and the descriptive term, נכריה, deserve attention. Let us first begin with Moab. Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons travel to Moab because there is a famine in the land of Israel. What did the author of Ruth know about the land of Moab? Why did the author choose it? The obvious connection to the land of Moab is the link to King David, but what is the nature of this connection? Topographical study in the last century has shown that the Moabite plateau has porous soil to maintain moisture and wadis which can sustain fruit trees after winter rains.<sup>17</sup> This fact may have been

<sup>14</sup>Levine, 96.

<sup>15</sup>Levine, 97.

<sup>16</sup>Levine, 97.

<sup>17</sup> J. Maxwell Miller, "Moab," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, ed. by D.N. Friedman, (New York: Doubleday), 1992, 883.

known to the author of Ruth and may explain why the family chose this area as a refuge from famine. In this section we will examine some of the geography, history, and archaeological research that has been done in ancient Moab. Primarily, though, this section is an analysis of how the Bible understands the area of Moab. Since claims have been made by scholars that the Book of Ruth may have been written during the periods of David or Solomon, their individual relationships with Moab will be explored specifically. Lastly, we will examine the way the term "Moab" is used in the Book of Ruth and the implications for dating the book.

#### *Origins, Geography, Archeology*

The Bible mentions the word מואב, in just this form, 166 times and these references are spread throughout the 35 books.<sup>18</sup> The foundation story of Moab in the book of Genesis explains that Moab is a child of the union between Lot and his eldest daughter (Gen. 19:37). Indeed, the story teaches that the name Moab comes from the Hebrew "from my father" (מואבי). Other suggestions for the name come from G. A. Smith who asserts that Moab is from יאב, to desire, and therefore מואבי is the participle form, translated as "desired land."<sup>19</sup> Another suggestion links Moab to a prince named Shemû>abu(m) who was the leader of the Shutu, a nomadic people known from the Egyptian execration texts. This explanation suggests a connection to the Moabites as sons of שׂת as they are known from Numbers 24:17-18.<sup>20</sup>

Northern Moab was better known to the biblical writers than Moab's main plateau

<sup>18</sup>The word is found in plurals and adjectival forms as well.

<sup>19</sup>ABD, vol. 4, 882.

<sup>20</sup>ABD, vol. 4, 882.



which was isolated by the Dead Sea on the west and the Arabian desert on the east. The northern part of Moab was more accessible to outsiders and therefore vulnerable to the invasion of Israelites and Ammonites. Miller suggests that Israel always seemed to have a presence in Moab. He quotes lines 10 and 11 of the Mesha stone to support his claim: "And the men of God had dwelt in the land of Atarot always and the King of Israel built Atarot for them."<sup>21</sup> The link between Israel and Moab is also supported by differing accounts in the Hebrew Bible of the borders. (cf. Num. 21:20, Isa. 15-16, Jer. 48). Since the discovery of the Mesha Stele we know a lot more about Moab, at least in the 9th century. We know Israel and Moab were foes and that many battles were fought over land. There is also the sense that a brotherhood existed between the two peoples and one wonders about prior family connections. Miller suggests that when the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Menasseh request land in Transjordan, it is the biblical explanation for the Israelite presence in Moab.<sup>22</sup> The question of origins will remain a mystery.

The earliest remains of any importance were found at Tel Hesban and date from the 12th century B.C.E. These remains are considered scarce by scholars but they challenge the widely accepted work by Nelson Glueck. Glueck claimed that a new people (or peoples) occupied the area around the 13th century, after a period of 600 years during which no one inhabited the land. Glueck based his assertion on pottery found in southern Transjordan which led him to believe that no one occupied the land from the end of the Early Bronze to the beginning of the Late Bronze period.<sup>23</sup> Although scholars

<sup>21</sup>*ABD*, vol. 4, 883.

<sup>22</sup>*ABD*, vol. 4, 883.

<sup>23</sup>*ABD*, vol. 4, 884.

find similarities between Moab's material culture and that of Egypt and Northern Syria, more evidence links Moab to its closer neighbors, including Israel. For example, collared rim jars were found in both Israel and Moab and the language of the Mesha Inscription reads very much like parts of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>24</sup>

According to Josephus, the ancient Moabites and Ammonites were conquered five years after the fall of Jerusalem by Babylon.<sup>25</sup> However, Assyrian texts "imply that Moab fell under Assyrian domination during the 8th century B.C.E. as did the remainder of the Levant."<sup>26</sup> We know little about Moab during the Hellenistic period. Much of our information comes from Josephus who believed that the Transjordan was under the control of Arabia (Nabatean) by the 1st century. Josephus refers to "the Arabians, such as the Moabites and Gileadites."<sup>27</sup>

### *Biblical Analysis*

Moab is only mentioned once in Exodus. However, the reference is mentioned in the fifteenth chapter which many believe to be the oldest segment in the Pentateuch. The verse sings of Yahweh's ability to conquer the armies of Moab, Edom, and the inhabitants of Canaan. The Book of Numbers mentions Moab 42 times, more than any other biblical book. The Bible "remembers" Moab as a fierce enemy, but the territory of Moab is also used by the Numbers writer as a geographical marker. The known boundary between Israel and its eastern neighbors was called גבול מואב (Numbers 21:13). There was also the place, שדה מואב, which served as a known landmark for the Israelites. In Numbers

<sup>24</sup>ABD, vol. 4, 885.

<sup>25</sup>ABD, vol.4, 890, Ant. 10.9.7.

<sup>26</sup>ABD, vol.4, 890.

<sup>27</sup>ABD, vol.4, 890, Ant. 13.13.5, & 374.

21:26-30, the author includes a song the מושלים used to sing. The song tells of Moab captured by Sihon, king of the Amorites. Verse 31 explains that Israel dispossessed the land of the Amorites after they refused to grant them passage along the king's road. (Num. 21: 21-24). The text presents a backward look at the destruction suffered by the people of Moab and mourns their downfall. The biblical author seems to justify Israel's destruction of the Amorites by citing the Amorite destruction of Moab. Miller describes the Bible's description as having "obvious propagandistic overtones; it seeks to legitimize Israelite possession of territory which even other parts of the Hebrew Bible recognize as belonging historically to Moab."<sup>28</sup> One can see, though, that periods existed when the Israelites felt close to Moab.

The many mentions of Moab in the Book of Numbers are due to the biblical narrative that proposes the people of Israel spent much time in ערבות מואב, the plains of Moab (Num. 34:29, 33:3 and more). According to the story, the people remained there until the death of Moses followed by their entry into Canaan under Joshua's leadership. The plains of Moab were the setting for Balaam's curses and blessings (Numbers 22-24) and Phinehas, son of Elazar's angry killing of an Israelite man and a Midianite woman (Numbers 25). Miller explains that these stories, though written as if occurring during the time of Moses, actually reflect the conflicts that occurred later when the Israelites lived alongside Moabite people in the north.

In Deuteronomy there are thirteen references to Moab. Moab is described in a new way in Deuteronomy, ארץ מואב (Deut. 1:5, 28:69, 34:5, 6) The same term is used in

<sup>28</sup>ABD, vol. 4, 888.

the Book of Judges 11:15, 18 and in Jeremiah 48:24, 32. Some of the same references from Numbers are also found in Deuteronomy such as גבול מואב and ערבות מואב (Deut. 2:18 and 34:1 respectively). A claim that ארץ מואב is, perhaps, a later way to refer to the lands of Moab is not unreasonable.

Deuteronomy 23:4 is a prohibition against allowing Ammonites and Moabites into the congregation because they did not meet the Israelites with food or water and hired Balaam to curse them. The text even incites the Israelites to disregard the welfare of the Moabites (Deut. 23:7). Edomites and Egyptians, however, are not to be hated. Interestingly, Deuteronomy 2:11 suggests that the Moabites allowed the Israelites passage.

#### *Moab in the Prophets*

In the Book of Judges, Moab plays a prominent role in two major episodes. In Judges 3, Eglon, king of Moab, subjugates the people of Israel for 18 years (Jud. 3:14) until Ehud ben Gera, a מושיע, leads the Israelites to victory against Moab. After Ehud kills Eglon, the text suggests that no conflict existed for 80 years (Jud. 3:30). The second major episode in Judges is in chapter 11 when Jephtah, an איש גבור חיל, sends messengers to the king of the Ammonites to explain why the Israelites conquered territory east of the Jordan when they entered the land of Canaan. According to Jephthah, confrontations with Moab existed for the same reason that they did with the Ammonites; the peoples prevented the Israelites from passing through their lands.

Since we know that the people were often "doing evil in the sight of the Lord" in the Book of Judges, it should be noted that they were also accused of worshipping Chemosh, the god of Moab (Jud. 10:6). Since the Israelites believed in the power of

other gods, Chemosh was a real figure to them, standing alongside Yahweh across the border. In the speech that Jephthah relays to the king of the Ammonites, he says the following, **הלא את אשר יורישך כמוש אלהיך אותו תירש ואת כל אשר הוריש יהוה אלהינו מפנינו** Yiftah challenges the king, "Would you not possess that which Chemosh causes you to possess? And would we not possess that which Yahweh causes us to possess?"

The events alluded to in this conversation and in the conversation between Ehud and Eglon are interesting for our study. When and how did land pass from Israel to Moab? When were the two kingdoms at peace and when were they at war? The Book of Ruth seems to be written at a time when Moab was not a feared enemy. Regarding violence between the two peoples, Miller says, "While many (Israelites) will have married foreign wives and worshipped local gods at Moabite shrines, there will have been counter efforts to maintain ethnic and religious distinctiveness; and this distinctiveness will have added a local dynamic to the violence which inevitably occurred each time the disputed territory changed hands (e.g., David's selective massacre of Moabites; Mesha's massacre of Gadites).<sup>29</sup>

We will continue to look at how Moab is described in Samuel and Kings with special attention to David's and Solomon's relationship with Moab. David's association with Moab is remembered by the Deuteronomic historian as both positive and negative. In I Samuel 22:3, when David flees from Saul, he asks the king of Moab to keep his parents safe. David's parents remained there while David was in the fortress (I Sam.

<sup>29</sup>ABD, vol. 4, 888. These latter events will be further discussed below.

22:4). It is this passage that caused scholars, even from an early period, to suggest that perhaps David comes from Moabite ancestry. In contrast, David's relationship to Moab in II Samuel 8:2 is one of conflict and confrontation, if not excessively violent.

וַיַּךְ אֶת מוֹאָב וַיִּמְדָּם בַּחֶבֶל הַשָּׁבַב אוֹתָם אֶרְצָה וַיִּמְדָּד שְׁנֵי חֲבָלִים לְהַמִּית וּמָלֵא הַחֶבֶל לַהֲחַיּוֹת וַתְּהִי  
 "And he smote Moab and he measured them in a line and  
 made them lie down on the ground and he measured two lines to kill them and filled the  
 line to keep them alive, and Moab was given to David as slaves and payers of tribute."

There is an obscure reference to another battle against someone or some place in Moab in II Samuel 23:20. וּבְנֵיהוּ בֶן יְהוֹיָדָע בֶּן אִישׁ חָזִי (חֵיל) רַב פְּעָלִים מִקַּבְצֵאֵל הוּא הָכָה אֶת שְׁנֵי  
 And Beniah son of  
 Jehoida from Kabzeel, son of a valiant man, great in deeds-he struck down two sons of  
 Ariel of Moab and he went down and killed the lion in the pit on the day of the snow.<sup>30</sup>

The period following David's death is marked by unrest and confusion primarily because there were rivals to the throne. However, the threat of surrounding kingdoms remained the same. Solomon, unlike his father, chooses to unite his people by embracing the gods of surrounding nations. I Kings 11:7 explains that Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, "the abomination of the Moabites," on a mountain in central Jerusalem. The Omride kings of the north will follow this example when they establish the cult of

<sup>30</sup>Translation from Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of I and II Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.), 1999, 350-351. Also consulted Everett Fox, *Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul and David: A New Translation of Samuel I and II* (New York: Schocken)1999. Both Alter and E. Fox add the LXX reading "sons of" to the Masoretic text, but it should be noted that the words do not appear in I Chron 11:22, the parallel text. Alter also suggests that Ariel is some kind of cult site in Moab.

Baal as well as the cult of Yahweh in an effort to reach all of their constituents.<sup>31</sup> The writer of I Kings, through the mouth of Ahijah, the Shilonite, criticizes Solomon for maintaining, or establishing, cult sites for other deities such as Chemosh. **עַן אֲשֶׁר עָזְבוּנִי וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַעֲשֹׂתֶנָּה אֱלֹהֵי צִדְיִן לַכְמוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי מוֹאָב וּלְמִלְכָּם אֱלֹהֵי בְנֵי עַמּוֹן וְלֹא הָלְכוּ בְּדַרְכֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי וְחֻקֹּתַי וּמִשְׁפָּטַי קָדוֹד אָבִיו** (I Kings 11:33) An even more relevant verse for our study is I Kings 11:1 which describes Solomon's relationship with foreign women, some of whom are Moabite. We will return to theme of foreign women in the section on the word נכריה.

II Kings relates the story of King Mesha of Moab after the death of King Ahab of Israel (Northern kingdom) followed by Ahaziah's succession. There is a dispute among scholars about Ahab's dates but his death could have been any time between 852-854 B.C.<sup>32</sup> II Kings 1:1 relates that Moab rebelled against Israel by refusing to pay tribute. The ensuing battle involves Mesha, who is referred to as a merchant of sheep (נִקְדָּן),<sup>33</sup> Jeroboam, and, according to II Kings 3:7, Jehoshapat, King of Judah. It is unclear which lands are the contested ones. According to Miller, it was probably "necessary only to settle affairs with a few pro-Israelite cities, perhaps only Ataroth and Nebo, since most of the population of the disputed region was Moabite and would have welcomed the change."<sup>34</sup> According to the account in II Kings 3:4-27 the Israelite army was becoming victorious. As a result, Mesha sacrificed his son at the city gate and the Israelites

<sup>31</sup>Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill) 1996. Van der Toorn discusses this in his chapter "Religion under the Omrides."

<sup>32</sup>Winfried Thiel, "Ahab" *ABD*, vol. 1, 100.

<sup>33</sup>II Kings 3:4

<sup>34</sup>*ABD*, vol. 4, 890.

returned to their own land. According to the Mesha Stele, Mesha recovered the cities Ataroth, Nebo and Jahaz, also known as Medeba.<sup>35</sup>

Moab appears many times in the Later prophets especially in I Isaiah and in Jeremiah. Both during the Assyrian conquest and after it, Moab becomes less threatening to the Israelites. Isaiah 15 and 16 are laments by the prophet who mourns their downfall. The prophetic writer demonstrates a clear element of sadness, as we saw earlier in Numbers, for the lost greatness of Moab. In Isaiah 16:5 there is an allusion to David's connection to Moab, "And a throne shall be established in goodness in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler devoted to justice and zealous for equity."<sup>36</sup> It seems that the prophet is referring to the throne of Moab, but perhaps the statement refers to the future king of a rebuilt Israel. A third possibility might be that this verse alludes to David's Moabite origins. When David sends his parents to live with the Moabite king, the text also relates that a lowly band of followers (I Sam. 22:2) joined him. Is this the text's way of saying that David's origin and the origin of his followers were non-Israelite? It is unclear, but the Isaiah text raises an interesting question: why is David's throne mentioned in the lament for the Moabites? It is not within the scope of this work to answer this question.

All of the cities that have so far been identified with Moab are mentioned in Isaiah 15:2-9 as cities that will be destroyed. The prophet uses words like "remnant" and "refugee" to describe Moab. These are the same words that are used to describe Israel.

<sup>35</sup>English translation of *ANET*, 320-321. From *ABD*, vol. 4, 890.

<sup>36</sup>English translation from, *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to Traditional Hebrew Text*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society), 1985.



In Isaiah 16:11 the prophetic writer is so attached to Moab that one wonders if he has relatives there. Whether or not the writer has familial ties to Moab, the people for whom he mourns did not recently take his home and slaughter his family. "Therefore like a lyre my heart mourns for Moab and my very soul for Kir-Heres"<sup>37</sup> (Isa. 16:11) Jeremiah, living a hundred years later, does not share these feelings of loss for Moab. Although he pities their struggles with Assyria, he mocks them. "Get him drunk for he vaunted himself against the Lord. Moab shall vomit till he is drained, and he too shall be a laughing stock. Wasn't Israel a laughingstock to you?"<sup>38</sup> (Jer. 48:26-27a) In the same chapter Jeremiah notes that Moab has not been persecuted before. If the theory that Jeremiah's family fled from the north after the Assyrian conquest is right, then verse 11 explains his attitude toward Moab in the face of the Babylonian conquest. Jeremiah speaks as someone who has experienced the loss of his ancestral home. "Moab has been secure from his youth on-He is settled on his lees. He has not been poured from vessel to vessel-He has never gone into exile. Therefore his fine flavor has remained and his bouquet unspoiled"<sup>39</sup> (Jer. 48:11).

The theme of destruction for the land of Moab is echoed in Ezekiel (25:8, 9) and in a few of the minor prophets. In Amos, Moab is accused of burning the king of Edom into lime. They will be burned by fire as punishment (Amos 2:1, 2). Micah reminds the Israelites of the Bilaam episode as if it were a positive thing (Micah 6:5). Zephaniah has a negative attitude toward Moab, comparing the land's fate to Sodom (Zeph. 2:9).

<sup>37</sup>JPS Translation.

<sup>38</sup>JPS Translation.

<sup>39</sup>JPS Translation.

### *Moab in the Writings*<sup>40</sup>

Not surprisingly Moab is mentioned in the Psalms. A particularly striking image is found in Psalm 60:10 and its parallel text in 108:10, "Moab would have been my washbasin." The Psalmist mourns the loss of Israel's political sovereignty. The psalm is attributed to the time of David, when Joab fought against Aram-Naharaim and Aram Zobah. The mournful tone of the psalm does not match the victorious tone of its introduction. Because the name of Yahweh is not mentioned and the Lord is referred to as Elohim, one might conclude that the introduction was not original to the Psalm. Perhaps it is an old El psalm written by those defeated by Yahwists. Whenever it was written, sovereignty over Moab was considered part of a greater sovereignty over the whole region. The prophetic writers and Psalms teach us that the Moabite region was so close and its boundaries so obscure that over time writers in Israel experienced a variety of emotions about their neighbor to the east.

Moab is mentioned in Ezra and Nehemia as one of the clan names of the people who returned from Babylonia. Moab is also noted in Nehemia's recapitulation of Deut. 23:4 (Neh. 13:1). The name of the clan is פַּתַּח מוֹאָב. Batten offers several suggestions for the name's origin in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemia. He explains that it is possible that a Moabite family settled in Israel and was later exiled to Babylonia with their neighbors. The word פַּתַּח possibly means governor, which suggests the family was important. The high standing of the family is conveyed in Nehemia 10:15. "The heads of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani...." Other references to this family

<sup>40</sup>All translations are from the JPS commentary for this section, with the exclusion of verses from the Book of Ruth.

can be found in Ezra 2:6, 8:4, 10:30 and Nehemia 3:11 and 7:11. The first word of the clan name may have been, originally, a different word for governor or Baal but was changed by a later editor. The family also might have been Israelite and living in Moab.<sup>41</sup> While we do not know the origin of this family, it is quite interesting that a clan counted among the Israelites bears an element of a Moabite name.

If the Book of Ruth was written as a response to Ezra's prohibition against foreign wives and therefore late, "Moab" in the story might have triggered the name of this family in the minds of the listening audience. This would have been a very powerful tool. פרח מואב is not only one of the leading families; they are considered true Israelites. "The list of the men of the people of Israel, the sons of Parosh-2,172, the sons of Shepatiah-372, the sons of Arah-775, the sons of Pahath-moab; the sons of Jeshua and Joab-2,812" (Ezra 2:2b-6). If the book is late, the clan's name explains why the author chose Moab and not Ammon, Edom, or Syria.

Those who claim an early date for Ruth need not disprove this point. If the purpose of the book is to justify the Davidic monarchy, one can claim the link to Moab is established in I Samuel 22:23. The mention of this clan in Ezra-Nehemia does not threaten their position. The question should be raised, though, whether scholars read too much into David's connection to Moab in I Samuel. Understandably, the story must come from some tradition but, perhaps, people are searching for a connection between David and Moab because of the Book of Ruth. The I Samuel reference may be given too much attention. Would someone read I Samuel 22 by itself and automatically conclude

<sup>41</sup>Loring W. Batten, *The ICC Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) 1913, 80.

that David must have a Moabite connection in his family? David also slaughters Moabites execution style when he is king.

The Book of Chronicles is a retrospective record of the author's view of human history and Israel's history. I Chronicles begins with Adam and moves quickly into the genealogy of the tribes of Israel. Genealogies are important for the Chronicler as we will see later in the chapter on genealogy in the Book of Ruth. The Book of Chronicles favors David and his kingdom. While he is quick to emphasize Saul's sin as the cause of his downfall, he never mentions David's sin as related by the Book of Samuel. (cf. I Chron. 10:13) David is the gold at the end of the rainbow for the Chronicler, and he makes no attempt to hide his agenda. "All Israel gathered to David at Hebron and said, 'We are your flesh and blood. Long before now, even when Saul was king, you were the leader of Israel; and the Lord your God said to you: You shall shepherd my people Israel; you shall be the ruler of my people Israel.'" In I Chronicles, David's relationship to Moab is only of conqueror to enemy (I Chron. 18:2). II Chron. 20:1, 22 relates that Jehoshaphat also waged war with the Moabites.

The Chronicler could imagine Israelites living in "the plains of Moab" and suggests that Shocharim began a family there. Shocharim seems to be a descendant of Benjamin but the text does not say so explicitly. His family line is explained within the context of the Benjaminite clan (I Chron. 8:8). As we have seen, the Deuteronomic writings do not use the word שׂרָה when referring to Moab, unless they are referring to southern Moab or greater Moab, which seems unlikely. To use the word "plains" is to write with a retrospective eye. The Chronicler writes the way the Numbers writer writes and this fact should make us ponder as we move into the Book of Ruth.

### *Moab in the Book of Ruth*

How does all of this biblical background help us understand the author's use of Moab in the book of Ruth? First, as we did with the other books, we will examine how the land called Moab is referred to in the Book of Ruth. Then we will note the other ways in which the term "Moab" is used in the book. Finally, we will suggest some possible explanations for these uses that will help us with questions of date.

### *Moab as a place in Ruth*

Moab is only referenced as the "plains of Moab" but it is written with two different letter configurations. In chapter one of Ruth, the word is written with the last letter *yud*, instead of the way it is written in all other places in the Bible. The word is found as שדי, the plural construct form, in Ruth 1:1, 1:2, 1:6 and 1:22. In three other places in the book the word is written in the singular construct form, שדה. The implication is that word is still plural (Ruth 1:6, 2:6, 4:3). The fact that word is written with a *yud* only in the book of Ruth might imply a late date at least for these verses. However, the question may be raised whether an editor would make the name consistent with the new spelling or the old spelling. The inconsistent spellings leave us with a mystery, especially in light of the suggestion that the book was written late but with an attempt to make the language look early.<sup>42</sup> For example, the term שדה מואב is found in Genesis 36:35 and Numbers 21:20 but not in Deuteronomy. It could be said that the storyteller wants the story to look like it could stand alongside a Genesis narrative or a traveling tale of a Numbers account. With this argument, the best proof for a late date

<sup>42</sup>Zakovitch offers this as a possibility in the introduction to his commentary, p.34.

would be if Judges used the term, since Ruth's author intends to set the story in this period. However, the term is not found in the Book of Judges. Rather, the term used, albeit infrequently, is אֶרֶץ מוֹאב and it can be found only twice in the book (Jud. 11:15, 18).

### *"Moabite" as an appositive in Ruth*

The book opens with a reference to Moabites in 1:4, "And they married them to Moabite women, one's name was Orpah and the second's name was Ruth and they (the family) lived there about 10 years." Ruth is referred to as a Moabite six times in the book, three times by the narrator (1:22, 2:2, 21), twice by Boaz (4:5, 10), and once by Boaz's young male worker. Boaz's worker, who himself is referred to as a נַעַר, calls Ruth נַעֲרָה מוֹאבִּיתָה. Two other appositives are used to describe Ruth but they are used less frequently in the story. In 1:22 and 2:22 Ruth, in relationship to Naomi, is called כַּלְתָּךְ and in 3:9 Ruth announces herself to Boaz as אִנִּי רוֹת אִמְתְּךָ. Out of nine appositives in the story in reference to Ruth, six of them describe Ruth as a Moabite.

Ruth's identity as a Moabite woman is essential to the quest for date. After we explore the use of the term נַכְרִיָּה we will further explore these implications.

### *Nochriyot*

The word "foreigner" as a singular feminine noun and adjective can be found in the Hebrew Bible thirteen times, yet one time it is inferred from a *ketib* (Prov. 20:16).<sup>43</sup> In the plural, the term is found another twelve times.<sup>44</sup> This issue of foreigners in the

<sup>43</sup> As a singular, feminine, adjectival form see Exodus 2:22, 18:3, Isa. 28:21, and Jer. 2:21. As a noun, see Proverbs 2:16, 5:20, 6:24, 7:5 (almost parallel to 2:16), 20:16, 23:27, 27:13, Ruth 2:10.

<sup>44</sup> Genesis 31:15, I Kings 11:1,8, Ezra 10:2, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 44, Neh. 13:26, 27.

Bible is a large one as is evident from the many passages that discuss the male foreigner. For our purposes we will examine only the passages that discuss the female foreigner. Many scholars, including Zakovitch, believe that the Book of Ruth was written to protest Ezra and Nehemia's prohibition against foreign women.<sup>45</sup> The fact that Ruth is not an Israelite clearly underlies the purpose of the book. The question is, however, whether the issue is Ruth's status as a "Moabite" or a "foreigner" to which the author wants to draw attention? The book of Ruth only contains the word "foreigner" once and therefore we must ask if the author want us to focus specifically on the word נכריה. Let us look more carefully at the other places in the Bible where the term is used. The two books containing the most references to "foreign" women are the books of Proverbs and Ezra. Ezra 10 is a powerful and dramatic scene in which many families come forward and confess the "sin" of marrying foreign women. The use of the expression נשים נכריות is plentiful in this chapter.<sup>46</sup> Nehemiah is also not an advocate for foreign women. He asks God to remember him for his zealous persecution of those Israelite men who married them (13:31). Nehemiah attributes Solomon's downfall to foreign women as well (13:26) which he may very well have determined from reading I Kings 11:1-8.

<sup>45</sup>Dr. David Sperling, my thesis advisor, holds this position based on the many biblical texts, both late and early, that the author of Ruth seems to know. In addition, he feels the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:15, 18 (marrying two sisters such as Rachel and Leah who are mentioned in Ruth 4:11, and having sexual relations with one's daughter-in-law such as Judah does in Gen. 38) are used by Ruth's author to challenge Deut. 23:4. The author showed that even Judah and Jacob ignored some laws (Leviticus). To make the case against Ezra and Nehemia's position, Ruth's author demonstrates that even King David, who is so revered, is a descendant of a foreign woman (against Deut. 23:4)

<sup>46</sup>See note 27 for references.

According to many, the Book of Proverbs is dated late<sup>47</sup> and contains numerous negative sentiments about the נכרית. The reader is warned against the words of the foreign woman more than once (2:16, 6:24, 7:5) and against her embrace (5:20). The foreign woman is mentioned in parallel to the harlot (23:27, 27:13) and a man who would accept a pledge for her is mentioned in proximity to other deceptive acts (20:16).

Rachel and Leah describe themselves as "foreign women" in much the same way that Ruth does. They are speaking about the way they are seen through their father's eyes once he has received payment for their bride price. Ruth also refers to herself as a "foreign woman" not because she necessarily views herself in this manner, but because she imagines that Boaz views her as a foreigner. "And she said to him, Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should recognize me even though I am a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:10) Rachel and Leah and Ruth do not consider themselves foreigners, or at least not as the negative stereotype would portray them. Although we are primarily examining instances the Bible uses the feminine form, II Samuel 15:19-20 should be noted because the language sounds similar to Naomi's "return to the house of your mother's monologue" in Ruth 1. I Samuel 15 is the story of Absalom's rebellion against his father, David the King. When David realizes that Absalom has grown too strong and will seize his palace, he urges his people to escape with him. When the foreign people of Gath, those who returned with David, want to accompany David's party, David releases them from the obligation they feel towards him. "And the king said to Itai of Gath, Why will you also come with us? Return to the king for you are a foreigner...return and return your brother

<sup>47</sup> "Proverbs, Book of," Freedman, David Noel, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday) 1997, 1992. (CD-Rom)



with you in kindness and truth." Against the late argument based on the word "foreigner," if the author of Ruth wanted to draw an easy parallel to I Samuel, he could have easily put the word "foreigner" into Naomi's mouth when she sends Ruth and Orpah back into Moab. The best argument, though, against the late date based on the word "foreigner," is that the author could have used the word נכריות instead of the word מואביות in Ruth 1:4. The expression would have been a clear allusion to the prohibition of Ezra 10.

Ruth's status as a Moabite could still be a allusion to foreignness since Solomon is accused of marrying foreigners, some of whom are Moabites. The Book of Ruth may be a protest against Deuteronomy's prohibition of allowing Moabites into the congregation of Israel. While not a definitive proof for dating, the terms "Moab" and נכריה in the Book of Ruth could suggest a late date. We will explore more variations on the answer to this question in last chapter.

### Chapter 3

#### Date Based on Language

The date of the book cannot be judged primarily on recurring themes. Philology is one of the best ways to date biblical texts we have. However, no definitive argument can be made for an early or a late date. Campbell is probably the greatest advocate of the early date based on language. Conversely, Baruch Levine comments, "a composition should be dated on the basis of its latest linguistic components."<sup>1</sup> In this chapter we will look at several instances where language might direct us toward date. The phrases that point to the late argument are נשא נשים in 1:4 and זרה את גרן in 3:2. Aramaisms as well as the plural suffixes with seemingly mistaken genders imply an early date. We will look at the expression that opens the book, ויהי בימי, in its other biblical contexts. Lastly, we will examine Zakovitch's list of "late language."

#### נשא נשים

Even Campbell admits that this expression could imply a late date for the book.<sup>2</sup> The word לקח is usually used instead of נשא in reference to marriage. The latter term can be found in Ezra 9:2, 12, 10:44, Nehemia 13:25, II Chronicles 13:21, 24:3. Zakovitch mentions that the term is also found in Ben Sira 7:24 [23].<sup>3</sup> לקח can be found in place of נשא in Genesis 4:19, Exodus 2:1, II Samuel 5:13, and Ruth 4:13 (also noted by

<sup>1</sup>Levine, 96.

<sup>2</sup>Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *The Anchor Bible, Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Double Day), 1975, 25.

<sup>3</sup>Zakovitch, 48.

Zakovitch). The question should be raised whether the fact that the "earlier" term is used in the book as well makes any difference to the late argument. Zakovitch notes, as do many, that there is one instance where נשא is used for marriage but appears in earlier writings. "The word is used one time aside from Second Temple writings, in the story of the concubine of Gibeah that is said to exist before our book, " ויעשו כן בני בנימין וישאו " (Jud. 21:23) But there is no certainty that the language of "נשא" in Judges 21 is intended for the matter of marriage and it is possible that it describes the taking (לקיחה), from the place where the seizing (of the women) occurred, to their territories (Benjaminites)."<sup>4</sup> In support of the late argument, Zakovitch also finds textual similarities between Ruth and Judges, such as word usage and themes. He believes they are intended to place the Book of Ruth between the books of Samuel and Judges.<sup>5</sup> Shlomo Bachar, a scholar who also asserts the book of Ruth is a "place holder" between Judges and Samuel, uses other linguistic connections to date the book in the first half of the ninth century. He also suggests that certain phrases found both in Ruth and the Books of Samuel and Kings are indicative of the First Temple period such as כה יעשה and ה' וכה יוסיף.<sup>6</sup> Bachar concludes that the Book of Ruth was written to temper the transition from the period of the Judges to the period of the monarchy. The author showed this by giving David an honorable ancestry despite the sinful period the

<sup>4</sup>Zakovitch, 48. (Translation mine)

<sup>5</sup>Zakovitch, 16.

<sup>6</sup>Shlomo Bachar, "And in the Days When the Judges Judged: The Connections Between the Book of Judges and the Scroll of Ruth" Beit Mikra 34, 1989-1990, 154. (Hebrew)

Book of Judges portrays.<sup>7</sup> Because נשא נשים is found in Judges 21:23, Larkin still claims an early date for the book.<sup>8</sup> Sasson, who does not take a stance on the issue of date, says the following:

Jouon, among a number of scholars, believes the idiom to come from the later period of the Hebrew language, occurring as it does in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemia. Such occurrences do not necessarily "prove" a passage, if not a total segment of a narrative, to be "late" in origin. In Akkadian, a better and more broadly attested Semitic language, we often find vocabulary and expressions in Mari Old Babylonian (ca. 1800-1775 B.C.) which recur only in Late Babylonian at least twelve centuries later. Moreover, Ugaritic literature is well stocked with idioms and vocabulary which are paralleled in Ezekiel and Isaiah.<sup>9</sup>

While this evidence is not conclusive of a late date, it seems more likely that the expression in Judges 21 is a gloss. It is hard to believe that the careful storyteller of Ruth would miss an important detail in his or her aim to create an authentic biblical story. It is possible that Ruth's author used the expression to draw another linguistic connection to Judges 21.

זרה את גרן

S. D. Sperling indicates that this expression is indicative of a later attempt at using the word זרה. The comparative textual work would indicate the same. However, the whole phrase is already awkward and requires some explanation. A translation of the phrase would be "he is winnowing the threshing floor barley." Should it be "of barley?" It would seem so. Yet, it is strange to say גרן השערים, the threshing floor of barley, where barley modifies the threshing floor. How can you winnow a threshing

<sup>7</sup>Bachar, 154.

<sup>8</sup>Larkin, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1979, 20.

floor? Are there other threshing floors, perhaps, of wheat? Campbell raises this question in a lengthy discussion of the phrase.<sup>10</sup> The possibility exists that גרן means "crop" or "crop for threshing" but we do not have a large enough corpus of literature to compare attestations of the term.

Comparative work on the phrase shows that the preposition ב or ל always follow the verb לזרות. For example, the expression זרה is found in Isaiah 30:24, אשר זרה ברחת, ובמזרה. The term means winnow but it also means "cast out" in Isaiah 30:22 or in Exodus 32:20 where Moses "casts out" the dust of the golden calf. The oddity that S.D. Sperling finds is that the direct object, the threshing floor, is connected to the word winnows or winnowing through the word "את." The term זרה את is found in two other places in the biblical text but neither refer to winnowing. In Zachariah 2:2, 4 the root is found in the imperative, "cast out Judah" and in Ezekiel 6:5, "I will cast out your bones."

The word גרן is not often found in construct forms. The word is only found in construct forms in place names such as in Gen. 50:10, 11, I Chron. 13:9, II Sam 6:6. In II Sam 24:16 and I Chron. 21:15 the term is linked to a person's name, as in PN's threshing floor. It is found in no other places with זרה. Sasson substitutes the direct and indirect objects and translates the phrase, "Now he will be winnowing barley at the threshing field tonight."<sup>11</sup> Zakovitch would seem to agree with Sasson.<sup>12</sup>

Campbell offers a radical suggestion to deal with the awkward construction. He

<sup>10</sup>Campbell, 117.

<sup>11</sup>Sasson, 63.

<sup>12</sup>Zakovitch, 88-89.

rejects the Masoretic pointing and reads the word for barley as "gates", a reading which requires no emendation.<sup>13</sup> He would therefore translate the text, "winnowing (the grain of) the threshing floor near the gate." Of course, Campbell must insert the word "near" and find historical evidence of threshing floors near the city gates. Sasson reviews this evidence and finds Campbell's suggestion "not totally convincing."<sup>14</sup> Sasson critiques both the way the word שער is used in the book of Ruth as well as the fact that the city gate lies some distance away from the threshing floor as Ruth 4:1 suggests.

#### *Plural Gender Distinctions*

According to P. Nash, Campbell's argument for an early date is based on two criteria. "The first was his ability to obviate previous claims of Aramaisms in the Hebrew text of Ruth. The second was his explanation of several forms normally regarded as masculine plural occurring in situations where one would expect feminine plural forms."<sup>15</sup> Campbell noticed that every time a masculine plural suffix was used with a feminine plural antecedent, the antecedent is two women. Campbell asserts that "we have, instead, evidence of a feminine dual suffix which is probably archaic and dialectal."<sup>16</sup> Campbell strives to prove that the previous explanation for these suffixes is not appropriate. Scholars thought that masculine forms tend to replace feminine forms in

<sup>13</sup>Campbell, 117-119.

<sup>14</sup>Sasson, 64.

<sup>15</sup>Peter T. Nash, "Ruth: An Exercise in Political Correctness or a Call to Proper Conversion," in JSOT Supplement Series, *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gosta W. Ahlstrom*, ed. by Steven W. Holloway & Lowell K. Handy, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 1995, 348.

<sup>16</sup>Campbell, 24.

later books such as Chronicles.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Campbell maintained that this grammatical form was older than the writing of Ruth (in the Solomonic period) and that the form reflected a special Bethlehem dialect.

Nash finds no foundation for Campbell's observation. He says Campbell suggests a linguistic lag..."from Ras Shamra to Bethlehem over four centuries."<sup>18</sup> In addition, Nash brings evidence that Judah had a common and unified language. This position casts doubt on Campbell's claim that there was a separate Bethlehemite dialect that survived over a period of centuries.

#### *Aramaisms*

In Ruth 1:13 there exist two words out of several that scholars have labeled, "Aramaisms." Aramaisms are Aramaic words which have crept into the Hebrew of the Bible. Aramaic language in the Bible has been used as evidence of late texts. The few Aramaic chapters in the Book of Daniel are prime examples. Campbell has shown that these Aramaisms are not necessarily Aramaic words, with the exception of הלחן in 1:13.<sup>19</sup> As noted above, Nash feels Campbell was successful in bringing to light the question of Aramaisms. Even if Aramaisms exist in the Book of Ruth, Nash notes that Aramaic was widely used in in the middle of the first half of the first millennium. "In

<sup>17</sup>Campbell, 25. See note to 1:8 and 1:22. In 1:22, Campbell cites D.N. Freedman's observation that המה is not the pronoun but the emphasizing particle (78). He cites an example from Ugaritic (hm/hmt). Also Dahood has found evidence of this as well in several psalms, such as 9:8 and 23:24 in *Psalms 1-50, AB*, vol.16.

<sup>18</sup>Nash, 348-349.

<sup>19</sup>Campbell, 24, 69.

addition to the ample monumental attestations in Syria proper, there is the peculiar biblical example of Eliakim's (Hezekiah's priest) request for Rabshakeh to speak Aramiac because he understood it, but few others would (2 Kings 18:26=Isa. 36:11).<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, Zakovitch uses the Aramaisms to support his claim that the book is late.<sup>21</sup> Sasson concludes that there are no real Aramaisms in the book.<sup>22</sup>

ויהי בימי

Scholars generally do not point to this expression when attempting to date the book based on linguistic matters. However, a few comments on how this opening is used in the Bible might be helpful. The expression occurs five other times in the Hebrew Bible: Isaiah. 7:1, Jeremiah 1:3, Genesis 14:1, Esther 1:1, and II Chron. 26:5. To many, the expression connotes story telling as it does both in the books of Ruth and Esther. Sasson maintains that the words do not suggest a fiction.<sup>23</sup> Zakovitch notes that these words open a story three times, in Esther 1:1, Genesis 14:1, and Isaiah 7:1. In all of these circumstances, the name of a king follows the phrase, highlighting a setting for the reader. Zakovitch questions the absence of a judge's name, since the story describes events before the establishment of the monarchy. Sasson also notices this absence and suggests the events of Ruth take place between the reigns of Jephtah and Ehud. Zakovitch offers the answer of the commentator, Emanuel the Roman. Emanuel

<sup>20</sup>Nash, 348.

<sup>21</sup>Zakovitch, 58.

<sup>22</sup>Sasson, 25.

<sup>23</sup>Sasson, 14-15.



suggested the famine is the time marker, rather than the reign of a ruler.<sup>24</sup>

In the introduction to his commentary, Zakovitch compiles a list of the words he calls "late language." We have already discussed his position on נשא נשים, which he lists first. Second and third on the list are the verbs from 1:13. Zakovitch says שבר is used in the Aramaic *targum* for "hope." Hope is the best way to translate the term תשברנה in 1:13. Regarding ען, Zakovitch says it is used by the early rabbis in the term עונה. Also on his list of late expressions are the words צבט and צבתים (2:14 & 2:16 respectively). צבט is found in Mishnah Hagigah 3:1. צבתים is found in Mishnah Menachot 10:9 and Mishnah Eruvin 10:1. The last term on Zakovitch's list is מרגלתי (3:4) which is also found in Daniel 10:6.<sup>25</sup>

The story of Ruth is a sweet one and because it was placed next to the Scroll of Esther, it has been suggested that the vague opening signifies fiction. Sasson is correct when he claims that the opening is not implying fiction. Rather, we could say the story represents a historical reconstruction an audience might have found entertaining. The author of Ruth wants to add validity to his or her story by using ויהי בימי, clearly tied to the monarchic periods. Lastly, the phrase does seem to be more present in the later monarchic period, at least not earlier than the eighth century. Not much more can be ascertained about Ruth's date from examining specific words, but we should speculate

<sup>24</sup>Zakovitch, 46.

<sup>25</sup>Zakovitch, 17.

about the style in which the book was written. We will return to this task in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4

### The Tribe of Judah in the Book of Ruth

Depending upon when one dates the Book of Ruth, the family of Judah plays a greater or lesser role in the overall purpose of the book. There seem to be two main arguments involving Judah's lineage. Those who date the book late cannot find the promotion of the Davidic monarchy to be the central purpose of the book. For the late argument, David's reign in Israel is only important because he descended from a Moabite woman. The validity of foreign women is the main issue if the writer lived during the 4th and 5th century. The concern of the writer of the latter half of the ninth century is that David's name and reputation are under fire, either by Saul or by Rehoboam supporters. The early argument is dependent upon David's negative portrayal in history. It must be logical that someone would write a story showing David's descent from a pious woman and his destiny to be king. In this chapter, we will explore the role of Judah in the book by focusing on two distinct examples. The first is the geographical and tribal context of Elimelech. He is from **בֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה**. The second is the genealogy which closes the book and the mention of Peretz in the blessing of 4:12.

אפרתים מבית לחם יהודה

Before we examine the "Judah" part of this tribal configuration, we must look closely at the first designation, **אפרתים**. This name could be from the tribe of Ephraim, as in Elkanah ben Yerocham... ben Suf-efrati (I Samuel 1:1), Jeroboam ben Nabat Efrati (1 Kings 11:26) and Judges 12:5 ("And they said to him... 'האפרתי אתה'). In Ruth 1:2 and I Sam. 17:2 **אפרתי** refers to men from a geographical place known as Bethlehem. Is

this term another name for Bethlehem? Is it a sub-section of Bethlehem? A similar term, אפרתה, is found in the "Calebite lists" in I Chronicles 2:18-24 and 42-50a. Campbell says the second chronology is pre-exilic and "lists a number of Judean towns as the names of offspring in the Calebite line. Ephratah, then, is in Judean territory but it is still not clear whether it names a city, a district, or a tribal sub-division."<sup>1</sup> Campbell concludes that I Sam 17:12 and Ruth 1:2 use the phrase in the same way. "With a cue from Micah 5:2[1], a good case can be made for Ruth and for I Sam 17:12 that the term is ethnic, perhaps a designation for a 'sub-phratry' (to use F.I. Anderson's term in *The Bible Translator* 20 [1969], 29-39), rather than geographical."<sup>2</sup> It seems that the author of Ruth knew Micah 5:1 or vice versa. "But you, Beth-lechem-Efratah, (you are) young/new to be among the thousands of Judah, from you he will come forth to me to be a ruler in Israel..."

Sasson cites de Vaux's 1971 study when explaining that the Caleb traditions were confused. One source in the MT sees him as a Kenizzite and the other (the Chronicler), as a Judaite. Efrat was one of Caleb's concubines by whom Hur, and later Bezalel, were born. "For our purposes, we should note that the traditions concerning the founding of Bethlehem and Efrat(ah), were by the time of the Chroniclers, much intertwined. Micah 5:1 presumes the merging of the two settlements. The parallelism Bethlehem/Ephratah of Ruth 4:11 conveys a similar attitude (cf. Genesis 35:19; 48:7; I Sam 10:2)."<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup>Campbell, 55.

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, 55.

<sup>3</sup>Sasson, 19 (de Vaux, 1971: 501-510).

dating of Micah would seem to be a clue in the search for Ruth's date. The author of Ruth specifically roots the family in this dual tradition at the beginning of the story and closes the book with a genealogy that ends in David. Clearly, David's house frames the book but the question remains whether David's role as a deliverer was emerging. This might place the book in the Second Temple period. According to J.M.P. Smith, "the date of vv. 1 (and) 3 cannot be decisively settled. The attitude of respect for the davidic dynasty and the largeness of the Messianic expectation make it reasonably certain that the oracle must be assigned somewhere in the post-exilic age. The period of Haggai and Zachariah, when messianic hopes were gathered around the name of Zerubbabel, furnishes the kind of background necessary to such an utterance as this."<sup>4</sup>

Ephraim and Benjamin are north of Judah, and Bet-lehem is at the northern tip of Judah, almost on the border of Benjamin. Bethlehem is the bridge between the geographical territories of Ephraim and Judah, yet very close to Benjamin. Like Anderson/Campbell suggest, the possibility exists that אפרתיים מית לחם יהודה is a sub-phratry of people from Ephraim who settled in Judah, and may have connections with the tribe of Benjamin. The most references to this "sub-phratry" are in Judges 17 and 19 which tend to be negative recollections about Benjamin. Again, it would not be surprising that some of this negativity is linked to an anti-Saul polemic. Bethlehem-Judah is mentioned 10 times in the Hebrew Bible (Judges 17:7, 17:8, 17:9, 19:1, 19:2, 19:18, 19:18, I Sam. 17:12, Ruth

<sup>4</sup>*The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Joel*, by J.M.P. Smith, W. H. Ward, and J. Bewer (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1985, 103.

1:1, 1:2). It seems that the storyteller wants to draw a comparison between Elimelech and the man in Judges 17:8 who has the same structure in his introduction (with the addition of "מהעיר"). This man left Bethlehem-Judah and went to "live where he chooses," stumbles upon Micah on Mt. Ephraim and remains there as a priest. This event occurred in the "days in which there was no king in Israel and a man did what was pleasing in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

Nevertheless, the question remains whether Bethlehem-Judah is in Judah or on the border of Benjamin. Most think the place is linked to Judah.

The only evidence at variance with these facts (Bethlehem is a Judean town supported by Chronicles I, 2:19, 50) is furnished by Genesis 35:16, 19, 48:7, I Sam 10:2; in Gen. 35:19 and 49:7 Ephratah is identified with Bethlehem as above, but from Gen. 35:16 and I Sam 10:2 it appears that the Ephratah in question, which was the burial place of Rachel, was near Beth-el and was in the border of Benjamin. Hence we are forced to conclude that there were at least two places named Ephratah, one in Benjamin and one in Judah, and that the phrase 'that is Bethlehem' in Gen. 35:19 and 48:7 is a gloss due to some reader who confused the two places.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the exact meaning of this designation, a tradition existed in the Second Temple period that the Davidic messianic line would descend from Bethlehem-Judah. Whether this connotation existed earlier is unclear, but it does not matter for the early argument. The Book of Ruth is not a messianic document, but one which highlights the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Judah was favored as early as Genesis 49, which no one would date in the Second Temple period.

#### *The Genealogy*

The genealogy at the end of Ruth 4 has been the focus of controversy for a long

<sup>5</sup>J.M.P. Smith, 103.

time. The question is whether 4:18-22 is originally part of the book or whether it is an addendum. An independent question of date must also exist for the genealogy. How this question is resolved affects the overall question of date for the entire book. The role of the genealogy forces us to define the parameters of what constitutes a book. Can the book exist as an independent entity without the genealogy? The answer is yes, if one concludes that 4:17b serves to end the story. A good case can be made that does. It is precisely because 4:17 links the union of Ruth and Boaz to David that the later genealogy has seemed unnecessary to scholars. We will see that recent scholarship tends to see 4:18-22 as original to the book. Essentially, there are two ways we can date the Book of Ruth. We can pretend the genealogy does not exist and date the book without it. Then we can surmise when the genealogy was added and for what reason. Second, we can search for a date with the genealogy as original to the book. In this section, we will primarily look at the way three major commentators on the Book of Ruth promote the latter option.

*R. Hubbard, Jr.*

Hubbard spends a great deal of his introduction on the genealogy. Based on several new studies of genealogies in the Bible, Hubbard asserts: "One can no longer brusquely dispense with such lists as mere "appendices" without any historical or literary value. Rather, one must regard them as the results of an ancient, purposeful practice,

reflective of political, social, and religious reality in antiquity."<sup>6</sup> Hubbard, himself, believes the genealogy to be integral to the book's purpose. He surveys the arguments for the position that the genealogy was added at a later date. He cites three major arguments: (1) the lateness of the formula **אלה תולדות**,<sup>7</sup> (2) the designation of Obed as the descendant of Boaz and not Naomi, as the text indicates earlier in the chapter, and (3) that the style of the genealogy lacks the beauty of the earlier narrative and constitutes a new style of writing.

Hubbard outlines the argument that **אלה תולדות** is a formula characteristic of the priestly writer. Excluding a recent trend toward dating P early, P has customarily been dated during the exilic period.<sup>8</sup> The phrase using the word **הוליד** is also characteristic of a late period. Lastly, the genealogy of Peretz is a facsimile of that in I Chronicles 2:5, 9-15, traditionally dated late. The author of Chronicles favored the house of David, as did the author/editor of Ruth. The genealogy is late and the purpose, therefore, is to strengthen the book's ties to the davidic line.

Hubbard's recitation of this argument is not complete. He discusses the lateness

<sup>6</sup>Hubbard, 15-16. For specific studies on biblical genealogies Hubbard consulted, see p. 15, note 40.

<sup>7</sup>A note on **תולדות**: **תולדות** is spelled three different ways in the Hebrew Bible. Most occurrences are in Genesis (Gen. 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:19). Gen. 2:4 and Ruth 4:18 are the only times the word is spelled with no full vowels. It is most commonly spelled with the first **וּ** but not the second. See also Numbers 3:1. The last way it is spelled is with no vowel at the beginning and with a full vowel in the second syllable (Gen. 36:1, Gen. 36:9, Gen. 37:2).

<sup>8</sup>\*For example, M. Weinfeld dates P early in "Ruth, Book of" *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd.), 1971, 518-523.



of the genealogy based on the lateness of P, but he does not address the concern that the whole book could be late because of P. If P is late, the immediate conclusion is not necessarily that the purpose of the book is to strengthen David's line. Hubbard wants to isolate this section to the matter of the genealogy, but in doing so, he submits an argument that will be easy to confront.

Nevertheless, let us examine how Hubbard confronts this piece of the argument. He rightly states the argument that P and Ruth 4:18a use the same genealogical formula is hinged on the actual existence and lateness of P. He cites two studies which challenge the notion that P is late or even that there is a P.<sup>9</sup> Hubbard says, "To be specific, in P the formula almost always introduces a major section of text, whether narrative or genealogy; here it introduces a genealogy at the end of a text. Thus, if presumed to function as its counterpart in P, the genealogy would have to introduce a (probably lengthy) history of the Davidic dynasty-a situation not true here and unlikely to be proven."<sup>10</sup> As for the predominance of the verb "הוליד" in the Ruth genealogy and its lack of use in other "P" genealogies, Hubbard claims that "for dating, there is widespread agreement among critics that some, if not much, material in P is pre-exilic in origin even if it achieved final written form in the Exile."<sup>11</sup>

Hubbard also cites the opinion of Sasson who asserts that Chronicles could have

<sup>9</sup>Hubbard, 18. I.M. Kikawada and A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (Nashville: Abingdon), 1985, and Y.T. Radday and H. Shore, *Genesis: An Authorship Study in Computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics*, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute), 1985.

<sup>10</sup>Hubbard, 18.

<sup>11</sup>Hubbard, 18.

easily borrowed the genealogy from Ruth, as opposed to the other way around. Sasson feels that the list in Chron. was written with more freedom than the author of Ruth displayed. According to Sasson, Ruth's genealogy was constrained by three things: the limit of 10 people, David's role as the tenth, and the need to have one person who predates the descent into Egypt. Sasson claimed that the author of Ruth was also constrained by the need to put Boaz in the seventh place, a place reserved for special ancestors.<sup>12</sup> Sasson cites Parker's study which shows that Peretz had no special status in the Chronicles list. Therefore, if Ruth 4:18-22 is an appendix, the marriage blessing of 4:12 must have been included in the book simultaneously.<sup>13</sup> The possibility also exists, claims Hubbard, that both genealogies come from the same source-Temple records.<sup>14</sup> Hubbard's claim is that there are enough reasons to support the argument that Ruth's genealogy is not a copy of the one in Chronicles and that there is evidence the genealogy is integral to the overall book.

Hubbard also rejects evidence that the genealogy is out of harmony with the preceding story. Specifically, he rejects the arguments of Rudolph who said the story ended strongly in 4:17b and that of Jouon who said it was discordant with author's earlier artistry.<sup>15</sup> Hubbard rightly confronts the aesthetic argument, simply noting that aesthetics

<sup>12</sup> Sasson, 182.

<sup>13</sup> Sasson, 181, S.B. Parker "The Marriage Blessing in Israelite and Ugaritic Literature," *JBL* 95 (1976), 23-30.

<sup>14</sup> Hubbard, 19, note 53. Cf. Campbell, 173.

<sup>15</sup> Hubbard, 16. See W. Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohelied, Die Klagelieder*. KAT. 2nd ed., Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962. Also, P. Jouon, *Ruth: Commentaire philologique et exegetique*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1953.

are subjective. A recitation of a famous genealogy, suggests Hubbard, may well have pleased audiences. Further, Hubbard points to others who maintain that there are literary connections between the genealogy and the remaining text of the story. For, example, he cites Bertman who asserts the genealogy is the structural counterpart of 1:1-5. He also cites Porten who shows the linear connection from judges to God as King (Elimelech) to the closing of the book with God's appointed king.<sup>16</sup> Hubbard likes the continuity between the blessings in 4:11-12 and the genealogy.

Hubbard's third objection, that Obed could not have played both the role of Boaz's descendant and the heir of Elimelech/Machlon, is also well grounded. He claims there are several weaknesses in this argument. First, there is an assumption that the later editor "missed the obvious," and that "popular ignorance of David's lineage allowed him to succeed." Hubbard says, "While not impossible, such a supposition seems improbable."<sup>17</sup> Second, Hubbard cites Wilson's study on genealogies and concludes that ancient practice would not forbid one from being part of more than one lineage. The purpose of ancient lineages is show the interconnections and relationships between peoples. "Hence, genealogies evidenced a surprising fluidity, freely shifting names in to, out of, and within their lists."<sup>18</sup> Hubbard concludes that it is possible for Obed to be both the descendant of

<sup>16</sup>Hubbard 17. S. Bertman, "Symmetrical Design in the Book of Ruth," JBL 84, (1965) 165-168. B. Porten, "The Scroll of Ruth: A Rhetorical Study," *Gratz College Annual* 7 (1977) 69-78.

<sup>17</sup>Hubbard, 19.

<sup>18</sup>Hubbard, 20. See Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1977.

Machlon and Boaz.

Hubbard believes the genealogy to be original to the book for two reasons. He agrees with Sasson that the seventh place in the chronology is reserved for special people. Because Boaz was awarded that place, Hubbard concludes that he is essential to the story. The genealogy follows directly from Boaz's role as hero in the story. Second, Hubbard believes that the narrative hints at an ending beyond the birth of a child. "In view of Naomi's utter hopelessness, only Yahweh can supply an heir, and such intervention would invest that child with a special destiny..."<sup>19</sup> Hubbard does not need 4:18-22 for this contention to be true. The former claim serves his argument best.

Hubbard finds additional proof for his position in, what he claims, is the purpose of the genealogy. The genealogy justifies the blessings in 4:11b-12 and the short genealogical list in 4:17b. Boaz became as great as Perez. Perez founded Judah's ruling family while Boaz became the ancestor of the messianic line. The genealogy seeks to reinforce important themes in the book such as Ruth's loyalty and her reward, God's providence, and the ability of a family chain to survive.

*Sasson*

Sasson also believes the genealogy to be integral to story, a position he knows to be odds with earlier scholarship. Eissfeldt, perhaps, is most known for his position that the original book had nothing to do with David.<sup>20</sup> Sasson suggests that a genealogical

<sup>19</sup>Hubbard, 20.

<sup>20</sup>Sasson, 178. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, An Introduction*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd (New York) 1965, 480.

appendix was probably foreign to an ancient audience. Therefore, the chronology was probably not considered an appendix.<sup>21</sup> Sasson believes the genealogy is inextricably tied to the story because Obed would be Machlon's son, not at all linked to David. As noted above, Sasson cites Parker's observation concerning the link between 4:12 and 4:18-22. However, Sasson has his own reasons for asserting that the genealogy is original to the story. First, the genealogy gives the story additional foundation in the historical past by setting Boaz within three generations from David. Second, the genealogy completes the inclusio of the judges period. Third, the chronology permitted the audience to find pleasure in hearing about ancestors. The first problem with Sasson's argument is that 4:17b also provides the same completion to the inclusio. The other issue, which also concerns Hubbard, is that it is hard to make assumptions about what ancient audiences liked or did not like hearing. Both Hubbard and Sasson offer good points, but their arguments are not totally convincing that the genealogy is original to the book.

#### *Zakovitch*

Zakovitch begins his discussion of the genealogy by admitting that the repetitive nature of 4:18-22 looks suspicious. Also suspect, according to Zakovitch, is the dual ancestry of Obed. Nevertheless, he cannot agree that the genealogy was an appendix.

This makes no sense. 4:17b does not overlap nor does it contradict the genealogy. The genealogy reveals to the readers that there is a divine plan in the birth of David. It is not a foreign concept to the work that Peretz, son of Judah, is the beginning of the Davidic dynasty. The connections between the story of Ruth and that of the birth of Peretz in Genesis 38 are in (1) the number of generations, 10, like that between

---

<sup>21</sup>Sasson, 179.

Adam and Noah and between Noah and Abraham. [In Ruth,] there are five generations until the Exodus (Peretz to Nachshon), and five generations from the conquering of the land until the period of the kings (Salmon to David). (2) The birth of Peretz opens the list, and, on the surface, there seems to be a flaw in his coming into existence, as there is with Obed. Both Ruth and Tamar could be considered flawed in their methods, but they are praised, and the proof of this is in the offspring of the two. David is the father of the link chosen by God to rule Israel.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, Zakovitch claims that the attempt to separate the story from the genealogy is arduous. While he maintains that to place an *אלה תולדות* formula at the end of a work is unusual, Zakovitch suggests the author takes poetic license to use the genealogy for his own ends. To answer the other critique, Zakovitch stresses that Obed needs to have two fathers for the story to work. He says "the blessings of those who sit in the gate to Boaz (4:12) are evidence that he is the father of the one who will be born...The house of Elimelech is peripheral to the generations of Judah. The writer of the book ties Elimelech's family directly to the tribe of Judah, through the house of Peretz. David and his house come forth from this connection. The genealogy at the end of the megillah completes...that which was at the beginning."<sup>23</sup>

Recent scholars do not want to detach the genealogy from the book as a whole. The link to Peretz in 4:12 and the reference to Judah and Tamar are clear connections that unify the passages. There does seem to be some overlap between 4:17b and 4:18-22 which no one can explain satisfactorily. Hubbard's point, based on Parker, is a good one. If 4:18-22 was added, then 4:12 must have been added at the same time. Hubbard concludes that 4:12 must have been integral to the story, thereby including the genealogy as well. However, we do not have to accept Hubbard's implication. It is possible that

<sup>22</sup>Zakovitch, 116-117. (Translation mine)

<sup>23</sup>Zakovitch, 117.

these pieces were added later, although, the addition of 4:12 at a later date is a stretch.

The late argument needs Perez, certainly in 4:12, and likely in 4:18-22 as well.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Final Positions**

Until now we have focused on specific elements of the arguments for dating the book. We have looked at positions based on canon, themes, language, and the presence of the genealogical formula. At this point, it is important to acknowledge the final position of each scholar we have referenced. In addition, we will attempt to locate the primary foundations for their argument. In addition to Campbell, Sasson, Zakovitch, and Hubbard, the positions of two more scholars will be presented. They are E. John Hamlin and K. Nielson.

#### *Hubbard*

Hubbard dates the book in the pre-exilic period, either in the time of David or Solomon.<sup>1</sup> First, he methodically attempts to dispute arguments for the late position. One argument we have not explored yet is that the book of Ruth is late based on its universalistic leanings. Because the Book of Jonah, often dated late, shares these tendencies, some have claimed that the Book of Ruth is also late. Hubbard asserts that we cannot rely on this comparison. Regarding the canon argument, Hubbard says that some early books can be found in the Writings. He suggests Lamentations is one these. He also relies on the argument that the canon was not divided into the three-part structure until 164 B.C.E.

Hubbard reviews four claims for the early date, but he ultimately looks to the purpose of the book for his own pre-exilic claim. He agrees with scholars who think the

<sup>1</sup>The following analysis of Hubbard is based on pages 23-35 of his commentary.



book was written during the Solomonic period.<sup>2</sup> The second claim is based on his understanding of the language of the book. He notices that the language is closer to that of Genesis and Samuel than Esther and Chronicles. Hubbard rejects the idea that someone wrote the book to look like it was a product of an earlier generation. He thinks that to argue the above position is to "relativize the issue," making it impossible to use the language to date the book late. He also says one would expect to see archaic language at regular intervals and not sporadically as demonstrated in the book. Hubbard cites Myer's study for one example, but he does not offer detailed evidence for his claim.<sup>3</sup> He does not address the many instances of possible late linguistic data, but still maintains that the language of the book favors an early date.<sup>4</sup> He believes the writer was a palace employee or a scribe with access to palace records. He assumes the writer was not from the prophetic school because there is little mention of the cult. Hubbard also thinks that the writer's depiction of David is not stylized in the Book of Ruth and contrasts this depiction to a later, more "stylized" depiction in Chronicles.

Although not his largest piece of evidence, Hubbard suggests that the author of Ruth is ignorant of Deuteronomy and must have written prior to 700. This claim is fairly easy to contest for several reasons. Regarding levirate marriage, it is clear the author of Ruth knew the language of Deuteronomy 25:5-10. In addition, the fact that the writer

<sup>2</sup>See Hubbard, 30, note 43.

<sup>3</sup>Jacob M. Myers, *The Linguistic and Literary Form of the Book of Ruth*, (Leiden: Brill), 1955.

<sup>4</sup>See section on Zakovitch in Chapter 3 of this work.

portrays a custom differently does not imply that he or she is without knowledge of it.

This view assumes each book of the Bible carried as much importance, and in all circles, as they do now. Hubbard ultimately admits later that the evidence based on the legal arguments are inconclusive.

Hubbard's fourth argument is based on theology, an argument we have not fully explored in this paper. He refers to a short book by Hals in which he claims that the theological perspective in the Book of Ruth is one that is characteristic of the Solomonic era.<sup>5</sup> Hals maintained that the hidden, yet sovereign, way God works in the Book of Ruth is indicative of Solomon's period.

Next Hubbard looks to purpose as the ultimate means to date the book. He rejects the idea that the purpose of the book was a polemic against Ezra and Nehemiah's prohibition on foreign wives. First, Hubbard maintains the position that the book lacks a polemical style. Second, he concurs that in Ruth 4:6 the writer should have had the kinsman reject Ruth because she was Moabite if he or she desired a polemic. Third, Ezra and Nehemiah's prohibition was directed against the corrupting influences of heathens. Ruth does not fall into this category because she accepts the faith of Israel. Hubbard does not seem to accept that the idea of tainted ancestry was prevalent in the post-exilic era. Fourth, Hubbard says the book's presence in the canon must detract from the polemic idea. He must assume that the disciples of Ezra and Nehemiah compiled the

<sup>5</sup>R.M. Hals, *The Theology of the Book of Ruth*, Facet Books, Biblical Series 23, (Philadelphia: Fortress), 1969.

canon of the Hebrew Bible and therefore would not include in it a book written against an idea they espouse.

Hubbard believes the ending of the book provides the clue to its purpose. The book ends with David ( 4:17b, 22) and its purpose therefore must have some relation to the promotion of David and his dynasty. Two themes in the book are most central for Hubbard. God's gracious rescue of Elimelech's family dominates the book and the Davidic dynasty is the surprise ending. Hubbard notices the link to other biblical ancestors in the book. According to Hubbard, they are present in the book to link David to a great past. He also maintains that David's connection to all of Israel is stronger than his connection to Judah specifically. The theme of accepting foreigners into Israelite society does not go unnoticed by Hubbard, but this purpose is smaller in contrast to the themes he deems central. "In sum, the book has a political purpose: to win popular acceptance of David's rule by appeal to the continuity of Yahweh's guidance in the lives of Israel's ancestors and David. In essence, it says, if the same divine providence which guided Israel's ancestors also provided David, Yahweh has indeed appointed him king. Further, given the alien presence under David's rule, the book adds that foreigners who, like Ruth, truly seek refuge under Yahweh's wings (2:12) are welcome."<sup>6</sup>

Hubbard concludes by offering a setting for the book consistent with his purpose. He looks for a pre-exilic time during which there existed a foreign presence in Israel. He concludes that David's time was the most likely time, but he is concerned about the

<sup>6</sup>Hubbard, 42.

retrospective tone of 4:7, "and this was the custom in Israel." Hubbard maintains 4:7 is a literary device, but he is willing to concede that the book was written slightly later, during the period of King Solomon.

*E. John Hamlin*

Hamlin concurs with Hubbard's view of the book's date.<sup>7</sup> Hamlin's discussion of date is relatively short, though he probably gives more attention to the discussion of Israelite attitudes toward Moab than other studies. Hamlin notes that Ezra and Nehemiah look down on Moab while Isaiah and Jeremiah sometimes have a more positive attitude. Hamlin suggests that it would have been dangerous for Israelites to live in Moab during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah, yet he does not engage in a thorough discussion of borders and relations between the two peoples. He finds that the Book of Ruth looks favorably on Moab and then assigns an early Solomonic date to the book. Ultimately, he seems to be influenced by Hubbard's research as well as Alter's name for this period, "a golden age of Hebrew literature."<sup>8</sup>

Though not directly related to date, it is worth noting Hamlin's thematic division of the fourth chapter. He separates the chapter into four differing perspectives on the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. Hamlin names verses 9-10, "Boaz's View: A Future for this Family." Verses 4:11b-12 are "The People's View: A Future for the People of God." Verses 14-17 are "The Women's View: A Future for Naomi" and verses 4:18-22 are "The

<sup>7</sup>Hamlin, 2.

<sup>8</sup>Hamlin, 10.

Narrator's View: A Future For Society."<sup>9</sup> Noting the four perspectives is a new way of reading the fourth chapter and widens the possibilities for meaning in the fourth chapter. Hamlin most likely had another agenda. Hope for the future is a clear concern for him. The theme of hope serves to link the book to his Christian theological perspective.

### *Campbell*

Campbell suggests the Book of Ruth is a "Hebrew short story." The Hebrew short story was told orally at first, "in the literary style which ultimately became written down, namely in the elevated prose with rhythmic elements."<sup>10</sup> Campbell dates the book between 950 and 700 but feels the book was probably written during the early part of this range.<sup>11</sup> As we noted in Chapter 3, Campbell feels the linguistic evidence points to an early date. Therefore, he will not consider any of the late potential purposes of the book. He is concerned that 4:7 implies a distance on the part of the writer. However, Campbell believes the distance does not suggest a long period of time nor does the verse imply the book was written after a major catastrophe (like the exile). Campbell dates the book during the period of Jehoshaphat's reform in the second quarter of the ninth century (cf. II Chron. 17, 19:4-11) but he does not agree the genealogy is original to the book. Ruth 4:18-22 is too much like the P list in Genesis 5:1-28, 30 for the genealogy to be early. Still, Campbell is hesitant about definitively categorizing the genealogy due to its unique placement at the end of the book.

<sup>9</sup>Hamlin, 59-77.

<sup>10</sup>Campbell, 18-19.

<sup>11</sup>Campbell, 23-28.

### *Sasson*

Sasson responds to almost every argument we have presented in this paper, but he refuses to commit himself to a date. Nevertheless, he cannot help surmising a setting for the Book of Ruth. He suggests that the period of Josiah (640-609) may be the best setting for Ruth, even though he cannot dismiss the reign of Hezekiah (715-687) as a possibility. He notes that the language to describe Hezekiah is matched only by those words used to describe David (II Kings 23:25). Sasson is most drawn to the excessive glorification of David as the purpose for the book. "It is quite unlikely that such a glorification of David and his ancestry occurred in David's own lifetime or in that of his immediate successors. Rather, an appreciable later period might be sought, one in which the activities of David might be recalled as precedent to those of a monarch eager to introduce reforms that either lacked popularity or required harsh readjustments."<sup>12</sup> These assumptions lead Sasson to the period of Hezekiah or Josiah.

### *K. Nielson*

Nielson finds two purposes for the Book of Ruth which sound remotely like those of Hubbard. The first purpose is to show that when a foreign woman is given an important role, it is because God chose her. The second is a political statement on behalf of David's dynasty.<sup>13</sup> The main focus of Nielson's study is the structure of the Book of

<sup>12</sup>Sasson, 251.

<sup>13</sup>Nielson, 1.

Ruth. She looks primarily to the structures of two scholars, Porten and Gow.<sup>14</sup> Porten demonstrates the book contains a completely parallel structure. There are four chapters in the book and each chapter contains three sections. The first and fourth chapters are in almost perfect chiasmic sequence while the second and third chapters are in parallel sequences. She describes the structure as having a "roundedness" and the narrative as having a "forward drive."<sup>15</sup>

The structure of the book creates a feeling of 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 that book ends in a genealogy. The lists of names rounds the story but at the same time excites the reader to ask for more stories. What happened to the David who ends the book?<sup>16</sup>

If one accepts Porten's and Gow's structure of the book, one must also accept that the genealogy is essential to the book. Nielson not only accepts this fact, she believes the book began with the genealogy as the starting point.<sup>17</sup> She formulates her own structure of the book based on those established by Porten and Gow. Nielson admits her structure is not a complete chiasm and therefore imperfect. Overall, Nielson's structure is good. It may be problematic to make assumptions about date based on a structure of the book, especially if it is not perfectly aligned. It is also hard to imagine whether the author intended each and every chiasm.<sup>18</sup> Chiasms in literature are, by nature, subjective.

---

<sup>14</sup>Murray D. Gow, *The Book of Ruth: Its Structure, Theme and Purpose*, (Leicester), 1992. Bezalel Porten, "The Scroll of Ruth: A Rhetorical Study," *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies* 7, 1978, 23-49

<sup>15</sup>Nielson, 5.

<sup>16</sup>Nielson, 5.

<sup>17</sup>Nielson, 27.

<sup>18</sup>It is particularly hard to see a chiasm in what she labels B and B1. See p.5.

As stated above, Nielson believes the Book of Ruth begins with the genealogy. However, she does not believe the genealogy was considered a positive thing. Nielson offers the possibility that David's ancestry was suspect. The union of Judah and Tamar as well as David's Moabite ancestry may have been considered tainted. Nielson asserts the Book of Ruth was written to polish the image of David in the face of threats to his family's reputation. The genealogy served to remind people of this tarnished image.<sup>19</sup> She suggests the threat to David's lineage could have stemmed from Saul's family who remained bitter or from Samuel's family.<sup>20</sup> Nielson assigns the book a 10th century date, specifically during the periods of Solomon, Jeroboam, or Rehoboam. Nielson also points to the possibility that the issues of the north and the south influenced the production of the book. The book was written to reclaim the genealogy as a positive connection. Ruth is the new version of both Tamar and Abram, restoring honor to Judah's line.

Although many have noticed the variety of biblical references within the text of Ruth, Nielson's gift is her ability to provide a solid literary framework from which to read the book intertextually. T.M. Willis reviewed Nielson's commentary for the Society of Biblical Literature. He noticed Nielson's extensive discussion of intertextuality in her introduction and the benefits of her intertextual readings. The fact that Nielson sees the intertextual issues so clearly and still dates the book early strikes Willis as strange. Willis says, "...it would seem prudent for Nielson to reconsider possible pro-Davidic

<sup>19</sup>Nielson, 16-17.

<sup>20</sup>Nielson, 23-24.



motivations for the composition of Ruth at a later date."<sup>21</sup>

### *Zakovitch*

Zakovitch remains uninfluenced by the recent scholarship favoring a date from the 10th to 8th centuries. He places the writing of Ruth in the latter half of the 5th century during the Second Temple period. He lists seven main reasons for his decision.<sup>22</sup> The first is the language of the scroll. The ancient words and expressions are characteristic of the Second Temple period. Aramaic had a chosen place in the society. The second reason involves canon, as we noted in Chapter 1 of this work. If the Joshua to Kings narrative were still open, the Book of Ruth would have been placed with (or within) the Book of Judges. The third argument involves law and custom in the book. Ruth is familiar with biblical legal language and the relationship between the different laws. The depiction of law is like *halachic midrash* and the author manipulates the legal material to coincide with the events described.<sup>23</sup> The deep attachment to the Hebrew Bible by the author and his view that it is a required book is characteristic of Second Temple literature.(cf. The Book of Chronicles)

Zakovitch's fourth argument for the late date is based on the writer's interest outside the scope of biblical law. He says, "There are clear echoes in the scroll of stories from the Torah and Early Prophets, verses of prophecy and wisdom, and even the

<sup>21</sup>Timothy M. Willis, Review of K. Nielson's *Ruth: A Commentary*, *SBL*, 1999.

<sup>22</sup>Zakovitch, 33-35.

<sup>23</sup>This is similar to Levine. See Chapter 2 of this work.

genealogy from Chronicles is deeply embedded in the scroll."<sup>24</sup> Zakovitch takes notice of the great amounts of biblical literature known to Ruth's author and to Ruth's audience.

The fifth argument rests on Zakovitch's claim that Ruth did not pass through the Deuteronomistic editing characteristic of Joshua to Kings. Ruth was written during the end of the period of this school, he says, but its "fruits" were known by the writer. Zakovitch says that the opening line of the scroll testifies to the relationship between the writer of Ruth and the Deuteronomistic school. Only in the Deuteronomistic literature is the phrase "judges" used to describe this period. (II Samuel 7:11, II Kings 23:22).

Zakovitch lists the polemic against Ezra and Nehemia as the sixth reason but he does not expand upon it. His seventh reason involves a comparison with the Book of Judith. Zakovitch asserts that although Judith dates from 4th century, it is similar to the Book of Ruth in both substance and spirit. As in the case of Naomi, Judith was widowed. The setting of the Book of Judith was also during the barley harvest. Both Judith and Ruth prepare to seduce men during the night, even though their missions were different. Themes of "cleaving" exist in both books. In Judith, Achior, the head of Ammon, cleaves to the God of Israel. Ruth cleaves to Naomi and her God. The similar motif of "women" in both books further connects them for Zakovitch. He believes the books were written in the same period.

In sum, Zakovitch believes the author tried to write in archaic language and to draw faithful pictures of daily life at the time. Zakovitch maintains that like every writer

---

<sup>24</sup>Zakovitch, 33-34.

of historical fiction, the author of Ruth took pains to create a realistic background for his work. Realia like the city gate and working in the fields were elements of society that remained the same over a hundred of years. The author based the rest of his details on the laws of the Hebrew Bible. Zakovitch concludes that the spirit of the time guided the author more than what he observed with his own eyes.

## Conclusion

Ruth 4:7 is, perhaps, the most interesting verse in the book. "And this is the way it was done in Israel for matters of redemption and exchange; to uphold any matter, a man would take off his shoe and give it to his fellow. This was the manner of testimony in Israel." I say this not because of the knowledge the verse yields regarding the history of levirate marriage. Rather, it is because the writer freely admits he or she is looking back on a time long past. In his *Perceptions of Jewish History*, Amos Funkenstein addresses those who say we cannot call the pre-critical understanding of historiography, "history," but rather only, "collective memory." He says,

"...the transition from pre-critical historiography to historicism, however revolutionary was not altogether sudden. Several indications of its coming can be discerned within the presumably naive consciousness that preceeded it, including the distinction between one "spirit of the time" and another (*qualitas temporum* in the medieval language) And even ancient authors were aware of varying linguistic uses: 'before time in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spoke, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was before time called a seer" (1 Sam. 9:9).<sup>1</sup>

It has been fascinating to look back on a text whose author maintains a retrospective approach. This approach goes beyond 4:7. The author of Ruth was familiar with Abraham's journey (Gen. 12:1) and with the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38). Ruth's author knew that Micah 5:1 suggested a great leader would come forth from Bethlehehem of Ephrath. Ruth's author played on Deuteronomy's portrayal of levirate marriage in 25:5. Ruth's author knew that marriage between Jacob and the two sisters, Rachel and Leah, broke the prohibition of Leviticus 18. Judah's union with Tamar broke another

<sup>1</sup>Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, (Berekeley: UC Press), 1993.

Leviticus prohibition, that of not uncovering the nakedness of one's daughter in-law.<sup>2</sup> The Book of Ruth reflects all of the biblical literature that has come before it. As noted in the thesis, this is one reason why scholars date the book in the Second Temple period. The position of this thesis is also that the book was written during this period.

The arguments based on canon do not yield an answer to our question. Perhaps, in the future, further studies on the compilation of the Hebrew Bible will provide us with new information. From the themes of Ruth, one can find good arguments for the early and the late position. However, the evidence points more aptly to a late date. The section on levirate marriage showed the authors knowledge of different traditions regarding the shoe. The language is reflective of Deuteronomy 25. In the Book of Ruth, Moab functions as a provocative expression. This place reminds people of a stormy past but also of a close neighbor. Moab is a place that figures in the historical memory of the people. It seems that by the time Ruth was written, Moab had ceased to function as a superpower in the region. The single reference to the expression, "foreign woman" does not seem enough to recall Ezra's prohibition. However, the term "Moabite" is a regular feature in the book and may serve the same function. It is possible the author felt the term to be too negative to spread throughout the work. As soon as Ruth refers to herself as a נכריה, Boaz quickly praises her efforts. If the book was written as a polemic against the prohibition, the term נכריה probably carried many negative connotations in this

<sup>2</sup>I owe thanks to Dr. Sperling for directing me to the comparisons with Leviticus.

period. The language of the book offers more evidence for the late argument, even though this position has not been popular in the commentaries of the last few decades. To be fair, though, there is no linguistic evidence that is a sure sign of late language.

Whether the genealogy is original to the book remains to be seen. More comparative work on genealogies in the Bible need to be done. There are many more questions to explore. The genealogy helps us date the book only if it was originally part of the book. We cannot know the answer, but 4:18-22 still seems extraneous when we have 4:17. The last chapter closed with Zakovitch's reflection on the author because his characterization seemed most appropriate. Our author most likely lived during the Second Temple period and was attempting to address the volatile issue of "foreign blood" in the cult.

## Bibliography

- Alter, Robert, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of I and II Samuel*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1999.
- The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin*, (London: Soncino Press), 1935.
- Bachar, Shlomo, "And in the Days When the Judges Judged: The Connections Between the Book of Judges and the Scroll of Ruth," *Beit Mikra* 34, 1989-1990. (Hebrew)
- Batten, Loring, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1913.
- Brettler, M., "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108/3, (1989), 395-418.
- Campbell, Edward F., *The Anchor Bible, Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday), 1975.
- Crenshaw, James L., "Proverbs, Book of" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (CD-Rom), 1997.
- Coxon, Peter W., "Was Naomi a Scold: A Response to Fewell and Gunn" *JSOT* 45 (1989), 25-37.
- Davies, Eryl W., "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 1", *Vetus Testamentum*, 31/2 (1981), 138-144.
- , "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2" *Vetus Testamentum (VT)*, 31/3 (1981), 257-268.
- Emerton, J.A., "Judah and Tamar" *VI* 29 (1979), 403-415.
- Fewell, Danna Nolan and David M. Gunn, "A son is Born to Naomi!": Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT)* 40 (1988), 99-108.
- , "Is a Coxon a Scold? On Responding to the Book of Ruth" *JSOT* 45 (1989), 39-43.
- , "Boaz, Pillar of Society: Measures of Worth in the Book of Ruth" *JSOT* 45 (1989), 45-59.

- Fox, Everett, *Give Us a King: A New Translation of Samuel I and II*, (New York: Schocken), 1999.
- Freedman, David N., "Canon of the Old Testament," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary volume*, ed. by K. Crim, (Nashville: Abingdon), 1976.
- Funkenstein, Amos, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, (Berkeley: UC Press), 1993.
- Glanzman, George S., "The Origin and Date of the Book of Ruth" *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 21 (1959) 201-207.
- Hals, R.M., *The Theology of the Book of Ruth*, Facet Boks, Biblical Series 23, (Philadelphia: Fortress), 1969.
- Hamlin, E. John, *Surely There is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*, (Grand Rapids: William B.Erdman's Publishing Co.), 1996.
- Hubbard, Robert L., *The Book of Ruth*, (Grand Rapids: William B.Erdman's Publishing Co.), 1988
- Josephus, *Against Apion*, .English translation by H.St. J. Thackeray, M.A. in Eight Volumes, vol. 1, (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 1926.
- Klein, Ralph W., "Ezra-Nehemia, Book of" *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.2, ed. David N. Freedman, (New York: Doubleday), 1992, 731-742.
- Larkin, Katrina, *Ruth and Esther*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 1996.
- Levine, Baruch, "In Praise of the Israelite מִשְׁפָּחָה: Legal Themes in the Book of Ruth" in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. by H.B. Huffman, F. A. Spina & A.R.W. Green, (Eisenbrauns: Indiana), 1983.
- Meyers, Carol, "Returning Home: Ruth 1:8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth" in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. by Athalya Brenner, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 1993.
- Miller, J. Maxwell, "Moab," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, ed. by D.N. Freedman, (New York: Doubleday), 1992, 882-893.
- Nash, Peter T., "Ruth: An Exercise in Political Correctness or a Call to Proper Conversion," in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gosta W. Ahlstrom*, JSOT Supplementary Series, ed. by Steven W. Holloway & Lowell K. Handy, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 1995, 347-354.



- Nielson, Kirsten, *Ruth: A Commentary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 1997.
- Oesterly, W.O.E., *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha*, (London: Society for the Promoting of Christian Knowledge), 1937.
- Philips, Anthony, "The Book of Ruth: Deception and Shame" *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 37/1 (1986), 1-17.
- The Responsa Project, Bar-Ilan University, Version 7.0, 1999.
- Sanders, J.A., "Canon" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. I, ed. by D.N. Freedman, (New York: Doubleday), 1992.
- Sasson, Jack M., *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1979.
- Smith, J.M.P., W.H. Ward, & J. Bewer, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Joel*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 1985.
- Smith, L.P. & J.T. Cleland, "Introduction to the Book of Ruth" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol 2, (New York: Abingdon Press), 1953.
- Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to Traditional Hebrew Text*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society), 1985.
- Weinfeld, Moshe, "Ruth, Book of" *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd.), 1971.
- Willis, Timothy M., Review of K. Nielson's *Ruth: A Commentary*, *Society of Biblical Literature*, 1999.
- Wilson, Robert, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1977.
- Van der Toorn, Karel, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 1996.
- Younger, K. Lawson, "Two Comparative Notes on the Book of Ruth" *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, 28 (1998), 121-132.
- Zakovitch, Yair, *Miqra L'Yisrael: Rut*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press), 1990. (Hebrew)