

RUTH, A PROSELYTE PAR EXCELLENCE – EXEGETICAL AND STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The little book of Ruth is not only a literary jewel in the Old Testament, but can also, as the article argues, be understood as a model for proselytism. Ruth can be seen as “a proselyte par excellence”. Jewish exegesis (Targum, Midrash and Talmud) interprets the book of Ruth in this way. But it can also be shown by exegetical insights as well as structural elements.

INTRODUCTION

The little book of Ruth is a literary jewel in the Old Testament.¹ With respect to literary technology and methodology there is no other narrative text in the whole Hebrew Bible which is as educated and well-structured as the book of Ruth (Nielsen 1997:2; Porten 1978:23–49). This has been noticed by many theologians, especially those interested in new literary criticism methodology.

The main focus of this book is the character named Ruth. She is a Moabite by birth, which means that she belonged to a people who were not allowed to come into the people of Israel for ten generations (Deut 23:4–5). Nevertheless, this book describes the story of a young Moabite woman, who was integrated directly into Israelite society without question.

It is therefore important to ask how the story reported in the book of Ruth could be understood as something which does not contradict God’s law. Jewish exegesis (as we will see) works on this question and answers it by restraining the law to male

¹ The dating of the book of Ruth is widely discussed among scholars. Possibilities vary from the time of King David down to the postexilic period (see Wünc 1998:37–43).

Moabites only. Ruth's decision to go with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem is understood explicitly as a conversion to Yahweh, the God of Israel. In the Jewish exegesis, the book of Ruth therefore answers the question of how a foreigner could become a part of Israelite society (as גֵּר) and finally a proselyte. It is the thesis of this article that this can also be demonstrated exegetically and structurally in the book itself.

This thesis shall be tested in three steps. The first step will be to look at the early Jewish interpretation of the book of Ruth in the Targum, Midrash and Talmud. Then we will consider the text itself exegetically.² What does it say about Ruth and her way into the society of Israel? Are there any hints in the words used or in the way the story is told? The final step will be to examine the structural elements of the book. If the story elicits being understood as a story of the conversion of Ruth the Moabite (the model of a proselyte par excellence), this should also find expression in the structural elements.

JEWISH EXEGESIS

The Jewish tradition in the Targum, Mishnah and Talmud indicates that they agree on their understanding of the book of Ruth. They all understand Ruth as a true convert and discuss the problems connected with this understanding. Most of the problems arise from the fact that Ruth is a Moabite and the Moabites were not allowed to join the people of Israel according to the law.

Targum Ruth

The Targum Ruth is fairly near to the MT, as Beattie (1994:10) has shown. It only deviates from it where there seemed to be an exegetical necessity for the translators.³ What is most remarkable about the Targum Ruth (and also the other Jewish sources) is

² I am following newer literary methods that take the text as it is and look for its meaning in the final state of redaction as found in the Masoretic text (MT).

³ According to Beattie the Targum "contains, in addition to its Aramaic translation of the biblical book of Ruth, a considerable quantity of haggadic material" (Beattie 1977:21).

the fact that the words of Ruth in 1:16–17 are expanded to a dialogue between Naomi and Ruth in which Naomi asks questions and Ruth answers in the manner of an avowal.

The Targum⁴ tries to explain the sudden death of Mahlon and Kilion by way of their marriages to Moabite women (Beattie 1994:19). Therefore, the marriage between Boaz and Ruth later on can only be legitimate from the perspective of Jewish exegesis if Ruth is understood as having converted to Judaism. That this is the plan of both Ruth and Orpah is made clear in verse 10 where the Targum reads: “*We will not go back to our people and our god, but rather we will go with you to your people to become proselytes*” (Beattie 1994:20). Right from the beginning, therefore, the idea of proselytism is evident in the Targum.

Consequently the words of Ruth in 1:16–17 are understood as the actual conversion of Ruth by expanding them into a dialogue between Ruth and Naomi:

Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you, to go back from after you for I desire to be a proselyte.’ Naomi said, ‘We are commanded to keep Sabbaths and holy days so as not to walk beyond two thousand cubits.’ Ruth said, ‘Wherever you go, I will go.’ Naomi said, ‘We are commanded not to lodge together with gentiles.’ (20) Ruth said, ‘Wherever you lodge I will lodge.’ Naomi said, ‘We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen commandments.’ Ruth said, ‘What your people keep I will keep as if they were my people from before this.’ Naomi said, ‘We are commanded not to worship foreign gods.’ Ruth said, ‘Your god is my god.’ Naomi said, ‘We have four death penalties for the guilty, stoning with stones, burning with fire, execution by the sword and crucifixion.’ Ruth said, ‘By whatever means you die, I will die.’ Naomi said, ‘We have a cemetery.’ Ruth said, ‘And there will I be buried. And do not say any more. May the Lord do thus to me and more to me, if even death shall separate me and you’ (Beattie 1994:20–21).

This idea of Ruth becoming a proselyte is maintained throughout the whole Targum.

⁴ The following citations of the Targum Ruth follow the translation of Beattie (1994).

When Boaz arrives at the fields and asks to whom that girl Ruth might belong, the Targum explains that Ruth came back with Naomi from the country of Moab to become a proselyte (Beattie 1994:23). This is further explored in Ruth 2:10–12, where Boaz states:

‘It has surely been told to me about the word of the sages that, when the Lord made the decree about you, he did not make it with reference to females, he made it only with reference to men, and it is said to me by prophecy that hereafter kings and prophets shall proceed from you on account of all the kindness that you have done for your mother-in-law, in that you supported her after your husband died and you forsook your god and your people, and to dwell among a people who were not known to you in former times.

‘May the Lord repay you a good recompense in this world for your good deeds and may your reward be perfect in the next world from before the Lord, God of Israel, under the shadow of whose glorious Shekinah, you have come to become a proselyte ...’ (Beattie 1994:23-24).

What we can see here is the fact that the law which forbade Moabites to come into the congregation of Israel was indeed seen as a major problem in the understanding of the book of Ruth. The problem was resolved by applying the law to only male Moabites. This was further strengthened by the prophecy that kings and prophets would proceed from Ruth.

Finally, in the Targum to 3:10 the first דָּוָד of Ruth is equated with her becoming a proselyte (Beattie 1994:27). Brady (2013) therefore maintains that the Targum Ruth presents Ruth “as the Rabbinic proselyte *par excellence*”. In his eyes, Ruth is “truly the Rabbinic exemplar for all converts” in the Targum.⁵ The same can be said about the Midrash *Ruth Rabbah*.

⁵ See also Zaluska (2013:172, 179).

Ruth Rabbah

In general, *Ruth Rabbah* argues in the same way as the Targum does. The reason why Ruth was allowed to join the people of Israel, even though she was a Moabite, was seen in the fact that the law concerning Moabites and Ammonites only refers to men (Rabinowitz 1983:30–31).

When Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to Moab, she did so three times. While Orpah decided to return after the second time, Ruth stayed and finally made it clear that she was not going to return to Moab but wanted to go with Naomi. *Ruth Rabbah* links this threefold request to go back to Moab with the three times a candidate for proselytism will experience repulsion (Rabinowitz 1983:36). So even before Ruth declared her wish to go with Naomi and to join her people and her God, *Ruth Rabbah* clearly marks the whole setting as one of proselytism.

The words of Ruth herself are explored extensively in a way very similar to the Targum (Rabinowitz 1983:39–40). It is therefore clear that the understanding of Ruth's words in 1:16–17 as the conversion of Ruth to the people of Israel (proselytism) is widely accepted in Jewish interpretation. We could sum this up with the following citation of *Ruth Rabbah*: “AND WHEN SHE SAW THAT SHE WAS STEADFASTLY MINDED TO GO WITH HER (I, 18) R. Judah b. Simon commented: ‘Come and see how precious in the eyes of the Omnipresent are converts.’ Once she decided to become converted, Scripture ranks her equally with Naomi” (Rabinowitz 1983:47).

Talmud Yebamoth

The last Jewish source we are going to look at is *Talmud Yebamoth*. This Talmudic tractate discusses all questions relating to a levirate marriage (יבום). We will first consider the Jerusalem Talmud and then the Babylonian Talmud.

The Jerusalem Talmud

In Chapter 8 it is discussed to whom the law forbidding the integration of Moabites and Ammonites into the people of Israel relates. In the same way as we have already seen in Targum and Midrash, this problem is solved by relating the law only to male

Moabites and Ammonites (Guggenheimer 2004:354). This is then explicitly related to Ruth and Naomi (Neusner 1987:267–277). We can therefore say that the Jerusalem Talmud is in line with the Targum and Midrash in understanding the book of Ruth as a book on proselytism.

The Babylonian Talmud

The Babylonian Talmud, too, discusses the question of why Ruth was accepted into the people of Israel, even though she was a Moabite, and solves the problem by stating that the law refers only to men, and not to women (*Yebam.* 69a and *Ketub.* 7b).⁶ But it also explicitly speaks about the central passage of Ruth 1:16–17. Like the Targum and *Ruth Rabbah*, it understands the words of Ruth as a model for proselytism (Goldschmidt 1931:475).

Beattie (1977:30–31) provides a helpful chart which shows the similarity and also the differences between Targum, Midrash and Talmud (and also Rashi)⁷ with regard to the understanding of this central passage:

Ruth R.	Targum	Yeb. 47b	Rashi
(a) It is not the custom of the daughters of Israel to go to the theatres and circuses of the gentile.	We are commanded to keep Sabbaths and holy days so as not to walk more than two thousand cubits.	We are forbidden the Sabbath limits.	We are forbidden to go abroad beyond the limits of the Sabbath.
(b) It is not the custom of Israel to dwell in a house which has no mezuzah.	We are forbidden to lodge together with the gentiles.	We are forbidden private meetings between man and woman.	It is forbidden to us that a female should be alone with a male who is not her husband.
(c) This refers to the penalties and admonitions (of the Torah).	We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen precepts.	We have been commanded six hundred and thirteen commandments.	Our people are distinguished from the rest of the peoples by six hundred and thirteen commandments.

⁶ See the translation of Goldschmidt (1931:17–18, 555).

⁷ Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040–1105 A.D.) wrote commentaries to the whole Old Testament and the Talmud (Beattie 1977:29). His commentary on Ruth seems to be based on the Talmudic version (Beattie 1977:32).

(d) (This refers to) the rest of the commandments.	We are commanded not to worship foreign gods.	Idolatry is forbidden to us.	Idolatry is forbidden to us.
(e) This refers to the four capital punishments of the Beth Din, stoning, burning, decapitation and strangling.	We have four kinds of death for the guilty, stoning with stones, burning with fire, execution by the sword and crucifixion.	Four capital punishments have been entrusted to the Beth Din.	Four capital punishments have been entrusted to the Beth Din.
(f) Two graves have been prepared by the Beth Din, one for those who have been stoned and burnt and one for those who have been decapitated and strangled.	We have a house of burial.	Two graves have been entrusted to the Beth Din.	Two graves have been entrusted to the Beth Din, one for those stoned and burnt and one for those decapitated and strangled.

This all makes it very clear that the understanding of Ruth 1:16–17 as a conversion into the people of Israel was common in the Jewish exegesis.

SOME EXEGETICAL INSIGHTS

The question raised – two poems in a narrative book

This book is a narrative throughout except for two short inserted poems: Ruth 1:16–17 and 1:20–21. The first poem comes from the mouth of Ruth, the second from the mouth of Naomi. Tod Linafelt (2010:128) has remarked: “The two poetic speeches of chapter 1, then, set up our two protagonists as the bearers of the fundamental tensions of the plot.” Linafelt shows that the main difference between narrative and poetic texts is “their treatment of the inner lives of characters and speakers” (2010:127). While narrative texts stress mainly the actions of people, poetic texts give us insight into their inner life, their feelings and emotions. While the first poem shows us Ruth’s decision to follow her mother-in-law Naomi to her people and her God, the second poem portrays Naomi as a woman who did not realise this decision. Naomi declares: “I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty” (1:21a). This shows that she did not value her daughter-in-law accompanying her.

That the two poems are in fact to be understood as interpreting each other is further underlined by the fact that these two poetic sections are only separated by two verses. While Ruth's poem seems to leave Naomi speechless, she responds to Ruth's commitment to her with her own poem (Linafelt 2010:128). Both poems even start with the same grammatical form, namely the Hebrew word *על* followed by a jussive form (Linafelt 2010:127).

When, as Linafelt points out, Naomi fails to understand the commitment of Ruth, it begs the following question: Will anyone acknowledge Ruth's decision to change her allegiance from Moab and the Moabite gods to Israel and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?⁸ This is the main question asked at the end of Chapter 1.

Ruth's decision – who recognises it?

One of the remarkable features of this book is that every chapter ends with a verse which concludes the previous chapter, but at the same time also opens up the theme of the next chapter. The last verse of Chapter 1 starts with a special construction. One can translate as follows: "So Naomi returned and Ruth (returned), the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned from the fields of Moab." The verse starts with a verb in the third person feminine singular, followed by two subjects. In such cases the action described by the verb usually refers to both subjects (Schneider 1989:168). It was not only Naomi who returned to Israel, but also Ruth.

Now the question would be, how could Ruth "return" to Israel? She has never been there before.⁹ The Hebrew word for "returning", *שוב*, is used as the *Leitwort* in the first chapter (see below). It may mean very literally "turning back to", but it can also be used in a more theological and figurative sense as "turning back from" (Köhler, Baumgartner and Stamm 2004:1328). Ruth did not turn back to Israel, from

⁸ Even though Ruth does not name the god of Naomi in these verses, her statement should not be understood as meaning "whatever god you might choose, I will choose". In the same way as a turning back to Moab would automatically mean turning back to the god of Moab (v. 15), following Naomi to Israel means following her to the god of Israel. In 2:12 this is further strengthened by the remark of Boaz, who explained that he received the sure knowledge that Ruth had come to Israel to take refuge under the wings of Yahweh himself.

⁹ The same word is used again in 2:6, where the foreman of Boaz told him about Ruth, that she "returned" from the fields of Moab.

where she once came. She turned from Moab, where her past lay, from her former people and from the god of Moab. The last verse of Chapter 1 therefore indicates how Ruth's decision in verses 16 to 17 can be understood: as a conversion of Ruth to the people and the God of Israel.¹⁰ But will anyone accept this conversion? Her mother-in-law, Naomi, seemed not to see this decision of Ruth's in that sense – at least not at the end of Chapter 1.

Naomi and her “daughter”

It was on the day following their return to Bethlehem, that Ruth decided to go to the fields to glean. The law especially allowed this for widows and orphans in Israel as well as for strangers living more or less permanently in the land (the so-called גֵּרִים).¹¹ Ruth's decision to go to the field therefore shows that she wanted to claim this right for herself. But she could not simply decide on her own. Someone had to grant that permission. So she was looking for someone, in whose eyes she would find grace (2:2). Naomi's answer to Ruth's decision is very short: “Go, my daughter” (2:2). While Naomi at the end of Chapter 1 did not seem to notice her daughter-in-law at all, she now calls her “my daughter”. At least on that very personal level there was one person in Israel who acknowledged Ruth's decision to stay with her mother-in-law, her people and her God. But what about others?

Boaz

When Boaz came to his field later that day he noticed the strange woman standing beside his fields. His question to his harvest overseer (“Who does that young woman belong to?”) led to the first encounter between Boaz and Ruth and therefore to the next step of acknowledgement of Ruth's conversion.

In the fields

Boaz not only granted Ruth the right to glean after the harvesters (which would be her

¹⁰ See also Zaluska (2013:174–175).

¹¹ Only strangers who decided to integrate into the Israelite society would be seen as גֵּרִים. (See Wünc 2014:1143).

legal right if her status as a גַּר was accepted). He also asked her not to leave his fields and invited her to stay with the women working for him (v. 8). In this way no one would notice her as a poor woman or a widow gleaning in the fields of someone else. She would instead be viewed as one of his servant girls and therefore be under his protection. Boaz further expressly stated this protection and told her that he had commanded his men not to touch her. And whenever she was thirsty she should come and drink from the water jars they had brought with from Bethlehem (v. 9).

This was much more than a גַּר was entitled to. So Ruth was astonished. Why did he do this for her? He did not know her. For him she must be a stranger (which may have been clear from her clothing or her accent). She therefore asked him: “Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner?” (v. 10). In her question Ruth used the word נִכְרִיָּה, which in the OT denotes a possibly dangerous stranger (Wünc 2014:1139–1142). It has been widely discussed why Ruth would use this particular word. Zehnder explains it with the fact that there is no female form of the noun גַּר (2005:407). But she could well have used a feminine form of the verb גָּר or a feminine form of the more or less neutral word יָר. What seems more probable is that she indeed asked Boaz why he treated her even better than a גַּר deserved, although he did not know her and therefore to him she must be just a נִכְרִיָּה. The answer of Boaz supports this interpretation. Boaz answered by telling her that he indeed knows her. He has received sure knowledge¹² of two facts: a) all that Ruth has done for her mother-in-law since the death of her husband (that she did not forsake her, but stayed with her and cared for her) and b) that she left her father and mother and her homeland and came to live with a people she did not know before (v. 11).

The decision to leave one’s own family and people in order to live with another people in a more or less permanent way was the requirement expected of a גַּר.¹³ Ruth had shown this qualification of a גַּר, therefore Boaz granted her this status (and even more than is legally required). Chapter 2 therefore shows that the decision of Ruth in

¹² By using a *figura etymologica* (a combination of an infinitive absolute together with a finite form of the same verbal root, Gesenius, Kautzsch, Bergsträsser 1985:382-383; Schneider 1989:219), Boaz declares the certainty of his knowledge.

¹³ See Wünc (2014:1143).

Chapter 1 is indeed recognised in Bethlehem. It is not only Boaz who treated her as a נָכְרִי, the facts that compelled him to do so were facts known in Bethlehem, because they were told to Boaz by others who knew about them. The question raised at this point is whether this will also lead to the next step, namely accepting the decision of Ruth to completely cross the lines between the two peoples and to become an Israelite. This question is taken up in Chapter 3.

On the threshing floor

We will not discuss here all the questions in connection with a) the plan devised by Naomi and its implementation by Ruth and b) the legal questions concerning the role of a *goel* and the redeeming of the land as well as the levirate. What is clear is the fact that, in the night at the threshing floor, Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz as a marriage according to the law of a *levir* and that she combined this in the name of Naomi with the redeeming of the land Naomi owns. Such a marriage would indeed imply that Ruth, as the person through whom both legal acts would be implemented, was fully accepted into Israelite society. So the question was not only whether or not Boaz would be willing to marry Ruth, but also whether he would be ready to accept her as a proselyte. And if so, would anyone else in Bethlehem also accept it?¹⁴ These two questions are answered in chapters 3 and 4.

After Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz (3:9), including all the legal aspects of levirate and *goel* in her request (Wünc 1998:229), Boaz answers:

‘The Lord bless you, my daughter,’ he replied. ‘This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character’ (vv. 10–11).

¹⁴ This is also the reason for the need to do all of this in secrecy. Ruth was explicitly told by Naomi that no one should see her going onto the threshing floor. Boaz should be able to decide on the case without being under pressure or surveillance. When Boaz afterwards asked Ruth to leave the threshing floor while it was still dark, so that nobody would recognise her, this served the same goal. There had to be a legal decision first before everything could come into the open.

As with his very first speech in the book, Boaz again starts this dialogue by referring to Yahweh and his blessing. He then calls Ruth his “daughter”. Since Naomi in 2:2 also refers to Ruth in the same way, this can be seen as a hint of the author that there is not only a difference in age between the two of them, but also some kind of family relationship to her (although she was a Moabite). Ruth has shown her “second kindness” even better than her first. Boaz here uses the Hebrew word **רַחֲמֵי**, which is a central theological term in the Old Testament. It denotes a loving-kindness towards others, a readiness to do more than is expected (Zenger 1992:39; Baer & Gordon 1996:211–212).

When Boaz speaks of the second **רַחֲמֵי** of Ruth, this refers to his first dialogue with her in Chapter 2. There he spoke about the deeds of Ruth about which he had secure knowledge – the loving kindness (**רַחֲמֵי**) Ruth had shown towards her mother-in-law and the decision to leave her own people and live with the people of Israel (2:11). This **רַחֲמֵי** led to the fact that Ruth was considered a **גֵּרָה**. Her second **רַחֲמֵי** was that she decided not to “run after the younger men, whether rich or poor”,¹⁵ but now was willing to be married to Boaz in a levirate marriage.

There was likely only one discernable reason for Ruth’s decision not to “run after the younger men”. It was her loyalty (**חֶסֶד**) towards Naomi. Out of this **רַחֲמֵי** she now was willing to marry this older man, Boaz, in the sense of a levirate marriage. Only in this way (and through the combination of the levirate with the function of Boaz as *goel* of the land) could she secure support for her mother-in-law.

This is the second **רַחֲמֵי** Boaz referred to. In his eyes this made her an **אִשָּׁת חַיִּל** (v. 11). The Hebrew term **חַיִּל** denotes “strength, power” (Wakely 1996:116). In the Old Testament it is mostly used for soldiers or mighty warriors, like the soldiers of Israel (Josh 1:14) or of Jericho (6:2), and Gideon (Judg 6:12) or Jephthah (Judg 11:1). In a figurative sense it can mean important people with a special character, like Naeman (2 Kgs 5:1) or the sons of Shemaiah (1Chr 26:6). And finally it refers to very rich people (1 Sam 9:1 or 2 Kgs 15:20) (see Wüch 1998:148–149). In Chapter 2 of the book of Ruth, Boaz himself is called an **אִישׁ חַיִּל** (2:1).

¹⁵ Which would have meant some kind of security and rest for herself, but not for her mother-in-law, Naomi.

The use of that same word for Ruth is remarkable. In the whole of the Old Testament there is only one other book in which a woman is called אִשָּׁת תַּיִל, namely the book of Proverbs (12:4; 31:10; see also 31:29). This makes Ruth 3:11 a very special verse. And it is not only Boaz who recognised Ruth as such a woman. Boaz emphasised that “all the people” of Bethlehem indeed knew this. It therefore makes Ruth the perfect match for Boaz, the אִישׁ תַּיִל. Boaz elevated Ruth to a level equal to himself. She was no longer a foreigner asking for a favour. She was equal to Boaz, a noble man in Israel, and therefore a woman with whom a levirate marriage could be performed. In this way Boaz acknowledged the conversion of Ruth from Chapter 1 and her status as a proselyte. But there is still the last question: Will the people of Bethlehem follow him in this decision? This question is answered in Chapter 4, first through the elders at the gate (legal status) and then through the women of the town (social status), followed by the final affirmation through God himself by making Ruth the great-grandmother of King David.

The elders at the gate – legal status

Boaz brought the whole issue of levirate and *goel* to the elders of Bethlehem. This was the only existing legal structure during the time of the judges (except for the judges themselves). Normally two or three elders would have been sufficient, but Boaz asked ten of them to assist in this case. Hubbard shows that ten is the smallest number which could be seen as representative of the whole (1988:236). Together with Boaz and the other *goel* they totalled 12, resembling the tribes of Israel. Boaz clearly wanted to ensure a completely legal meeting, so that no further legal doubts could later arise (Wünc 1998:301).

Before the elders, Boaz presented the case to the other *goel*.¹⁶ He did so by starting with the most profitable part of the deal, the announcement of Naomi to sell her property. In view of the legislation concerning land property in Israel, this meant that land belonging to Naomi had previously been bought by a non-family member and she

¹⁶ The other *goel* remains nameless. The Hebrew אִישׁ אֲחֵרִים simply means “somebody”. The discussion regarding why he is not referred to by name is not essential in our context (for more information see Wünc 1998:261).

now wanted to cede her legal right to buy the land to one of her close relatives. This was part of the responsibility of a *goel* (see Wünc 1998:30).

The offer of Naomi to buy her land back therefore seemed a fortunate opportunity for the *goel*. There was no relative closer than he; no heir to inherit the land from him at the time of jubilee. This meant that the land would permanently become part of his own property. The only necessary requirement was to care for Naomi (and perhaps Ruth also). But this could have been no obstacle in light of the profitable increase of property. The other *goel* therefore gladly and immediately consented to the offer that Boaz had presented to him in the name of Naomi.

But, as in many legal contexts, there was some important small print! Boaz declared:

On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property (v. 5).

This changed everything. It meant that, once the young woman Ruth became pregnant and gave birth to a child, this child would become the heir of the property which once belonged to Elimelech and Naomi. The *goel* would therefore have to pay for the land, then marry Ruth, care for her and also for Naomi, and finally lose everything as soon as they had a child together. It may even be that part of his own property would leave his family because Ruth's child would also be considered his child, not only that of the deceased (see Wünc 1998:272). In light of this small print the other *goel* in fact decided not to take Naomi's offer. To do so would endanger his own estate (v. 6). Of course all of this was also true for Boaz. He must have already considered all this the night before at the threshing floor, when he consented to Ruth's marriage proposal. In this way he proves to be an *איש חיל*, worthy of marrying this *אשה חיל* Ruth. As Ruth was willing to sacrifice her own happiness for her mother-in-law, Naomi, Boaz was willing to sacrifice part of his property by helping Ruth and Naomi.¹⁷

¹⁷ One should not too easily jump to the conclusion that there was a love story behind the relationship between Boaz and Ruth. That would just be our Western way of interpreting a story which presents a young lady and an elderly landowner marrying. There is no indication in the text itself that such a romance is behind the incidents reported. It is about

At this point the most crucial situation in the whole book arises: will the elders of Bethlehem accept this “bargain”? Are they going to consent to the double transaction of land ownership in combination with the marriage between Boaz and the Moabite, Ruth? In his presentation of the case, Boaz deliberately called Ruth “the Moabite” (v. 5). Legally this was a very difficult situation. Boaz therefore very clearly stated the fact that his marriage with Ruth would also be part of the contract, and what the implications of this marriage were to be:¹⁸

I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses! (v. 10).

Again (and for the last time in the book) Ruth is expressly called “the Moabite”. Through marriage with Ruth the line of Mahlon was to be preserved in Israel, as well as his property. If this was the case, Ruth would surely no longer be “the Moabite”. From then on (“today”) she would be seen as an Israelite woman, a fully integrated member of the people of Israel.

The decision of the elders was absolutely clear. Not only were they witnesses to the legal act, they also very decisively placed Ruth in the people of Israel. Their blessing on Boaz and Ruth asked that the Lord make “this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel” (v. 11). By setting Ruth in one line with the two most important women in the history of Israel, they made clear that from then on there would be no distinction whatsoever between Ruth and any Israelite woman. This woman Ruth may help Boaz to gain more *תּוֹלָדָה* in Ephratha¹⁹ and a famous name in Bethlehem. This blessing already foreshadows the fact that one of the immediate descendants of Boaz will be King David.

תּוֹלָדָה, not about romantic love in the first place.

¹⁸ The fact that the first part of verse 10 is an almost identical repetition of verse 6 shows that this was indeed the most important point in the whole negotiation.

¹⁹ This plays on the idea that a marriage between an *אִישׁ תּוֹלָדָה* and an *אִשָּׁת תּוֹלָדָה* can only lead to more *תּוֹלָדָה*.

But not only was reference made to Rachel and Leah. The elders also blessed Boaz and Ruth, reminding them of another instance when a foreign woman under obscure circumstances came to be the mother of an important part of Israel, and from whom Boaz himself was descended: Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah. “May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah” (v. 12), they declare.

Through this statement and the blessing of the elders at the gates of Bethlehem, the legal status of Ruth became clear. From then on she was to be seen as a proselyte, a full member of the house of Israel. The two questions remaining now are: a) Will this also be true for her social status? and b) Is all of this according to God’s will?

The women of Bethlehem – social status

The silence of the women of Bethlehem at the end of Chapter 1, where they could not answer to Naomi’s bitterness, now finally comes to an end. When Ruth becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, the women of Bethlehem again speak with Naomi. They first bless the Lord for giving a son to Naomi (vv. 14-15a).²⁰ Then they turn their attention to Ruth and declare her, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, to be worth more than seven sons, because of her love towards Naomi.²¹ While Ruth in 1:19 was not even given recognition by her mother-in-law, she has now proven to be invaluable to her. Through this statement by the women of Bethlehem, it becomes clear that not only the legal status, but also the social status of Ruth was now established. She was accepted as part of Israel.

Only one last question remains: Will God also agree with this?

The final affirmation – Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David

In 4:17 the author of the book makes clear what would be the result of this story: namely the great King David. While the beginning of the book started with the time of the judges (1:1), the book ends with the time of the kings, and in particular with its

²⁰ It seems that Naomi officially “adopted” Obed by taking him onto her lap (v. 16). By doing this she made it clear that Obed was not only the son of Boaz and the son of Mahlon, but also the son of Elimelech. He would inherit all the property belonging to Elimelech.

²¹ In fact this is the only place in the whole book where love is mentioned.

most prominent one: King David.

The final genealogy starts with Perez (revealing that the blessing of the elders in 4:12 had been fulfilled) and ends with David. By adding the genealogy the author wants to show that not only the elders and the women of Bethlehem accepted Ruth into the people of Israel, but also God himself.²²

Additional exegetical insights

Two additional exegetical insights serve to fill in the picture more fully and will be briefly dealt with here.

Ruth, the Moabite

The book very often speaks of Ruth as “the Moabite”. We already know her provenance from Chapter 1 where it is said that Mahlon and Kilion married Moabite women. It is therefore not necessary to constantly remind the reader of this fact. The first time Ruth is called “the Moabite” is in 1:22. As stated above, this verse is important because it shows that Ruth’s decision in 1:16–17 can be understood as her decision to join the people of Israel. But this same Ruth was a Moabite. How can that be resolved?

Then in 2:2 Ruth, the Moabite, decided to go gleaning in the fields. How could this be, since gleaning was only allowed for a foreigner who lived as a נָכְרִי in Israel? Could Ruth be seen as such an integrated stranger or even more than that? The problem was intensified in verse 6 when the overseer told Boaz that this very woman was a Moabite who returned together with Naomi from the fields of Moab. Twice in this short statement we find a reference to Moab. But we also notice that the overseer stresses the fact that this very Moabite woman “returned” to Bethlehem (see above).

In 2:21 Ruth declares in her speech with Naomi that Boaz had given her permission to glean in his fields for the whole time of the harvest. In this verse we find

²² The reason for writing this book might be that there were people criticising David and his rule by referring to his “unclean” ancestry by coming from a Moabite woman. The book would then show the hand of God in the whole process of bringing Ruth to Bethlehem and into the family of David.

another reference to her as “the Moabite”. There is no apparent need for such a detail in this context. It is only Ruth speaking with her mother-in-law. The reference therefore must have another purpose, which can only be that the author wants to stress the fact that Boaz indeed granted the status of a נָכְרִי to this Moabite woman.

There are two further references to Ruth as “the Moabite”, namely in 4:5 (where Boaz identified her in the negotiations with the other *goel*) and 4:10 (where the elders in their final judgment referred to her ethnic background). Both of these instances have already been considered.

In the whole book of Ruth we find only four instances where Ruth is mentioned without the addition “the Moabite”. One of these is in her own words in 3:9; the other three can be found in 2:8 from the mouth of Boaz, in 2:22 from the mouth of Naomi and in 4:13, where the narrator speaks. Glover (2009:302) rightly explains the findings in the following way:

I propose that Ruth’s name is used without the Moabite tag whenever her re-situation within Israel has been recognized. The first of these moments occurs with Boaz (2.8): the man who recognizes that she has left her father, mother, birthplace, and is now re-situated under the wings of Yhwh (2.12 ...).

The second recognition is offered by Naomi in Ruth 2.22. ... Since Ruth is now situated in the field of Boaz, she is now ‘Ruth her daughter-in-law’.

The final recognition is offered by the entire assembly (4.13). ... At last they too refer to her as ‘Ruth’.

Yahweh, the God of Israel

In 2:12 Boaz praised Ruth and her decision to take refuge under the wings of Yahweh, the God of Israel. There are only three occasions in the book where “Israel” is explicitly mentioned.²³ The first is in this verse, then again in 4:11 (where the elders

²³ 4:7 also contains a reference to Israel but is not included here since it appears to be a later addition to the book for explaining the former habit of exchanging shoes when making a

speak about the family of Israel having been established through the mothers Rachel and Leah) and 4:14 (where the women praise Obed and bless him that he may become famous in Israel). Therefore this verse in 2:12 is actually quite remarkable. Throughout the entire book God is always called “Yahweh” (his covenantal name, denoting his relationship with his people). Here only we find the addition, “the God of Israel”. This must be of importance.

Ruth, according to Boaz, had come to seek refuge under the wings of Yahweh, the God of Israel. This was indeed what she had done. She had broken down every bridge with her former life (see 1:16–17), making the God of Naomi her God and the people of Naomi her people. This was what Boaz meant with the image of the wings of Yahweh (cf. Ps 17:8). In 3:9 Ruth herself used the same word, “wings”, in her request for marriage, but now in the singular. Literally it says: “Spread your wing over your maidservant”.²⁴ By using the same word as in 2:12 the author makes clear that it is now Boaz himself who is being asked to fulfil his blessing uttered on the fields. Ruth came to seek refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. Boaz is the one who is about to bring this appeal to a positive end by taking her under his own “wing”. Through this levirate marriage Ruth would indeed find her shelter under the wings of Yahweh, the God of Israel (who now would also be her God).

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

The book has a remarkable structure. Each chapter has its own chiastic composition (with the exception of chapter 4 where we do not find an overall chiastic structure due to the final genealogy). Each chapter is also divided into three sections, the first introducing the chapter, the last concluding it, while the middle section presents the main topic of the chapter. Most of these sections are also themselves chiastic in structure. There are more structural elements found in the book, but the use of chiastic

contract.

²⁴ The spreading of the wings of one’s garment was a picture used to denote marriage (Wünc 1998:227–228).

structuring is the most prominent.²⁵

A second element which is very important is the so-called *Leitwortstil*. Each chapter has one word that appears frequently and at important positions in the text (see Zenger 1992:18; Wünc 1998:48–50). We will examine both of these two structural elements to see what they can add to the exegetical insights gathered so far.

The chiastic structure

Chapters 1 to 3 present themselves in a similar fashion. Each starts with an introduction to the chapter, followed by the main section which develops the topic of the chapter. The last section then sums up the result of the chapter and connects it to the next one by making a time reference that relates the two chapters. Only the fourth chapter seems to be structured somewhat differently. Here the first two sections appear equally long and important and serve to develop the overall story (i.e., the negotiation at the gates of Bethlehem and the birth of Obed, the grandfather of David). The third section (the genealogy) then places the whole story within the bigger narrative of Israel and opens it to the future. While the first three chapters are structured as follows: beginning – middle – end, Chapter 4 is linear, leading as it does, step by step, to the final placement of the whole into the greater history of Israel.

We will now look closer at each of the four chapters and their structures and evaluate in which way they add to the view of Ruth as a proselyte par excellence.

Chapter 1 – Ruth coming into Israel and her decision to become a נָכְרִי

The first chapter presents an overall chiastic structure with its centre in verse 10, where we find the decision of Ruth (and Orpah), to join Naomi on her way back to Bethlehem. The topic of this chapter therefore is: How did Ruth come into the people of Israel?

This topic is unfolded in each of the three sub-sections. The first (vv. 1–6)

²⁵ For a very detailed presentation of the structural elements see Porten (1978:23–49) and Gow (1992:91f.). These structural elements have been used and explored by the author in his commentary on the book of Ruth (Wünc 1998). They are now further developed in light of the special question raised in this article.

arranges its chiastic structure around verse 4, where we read how Ruth came into the family of Elimelech and Naomi. The second sub-section (vv. 7–18), which presents the main part of the chapter, centres on verse 16b: “Your people will be my people and your God my God”. This is the most important part of Ruth’s commitment. It can, as already argued, be understood as a conversion to the God of Israel and his people. This is even more than what was expected from a גַּר, who only had to respect the God of Israel by following the most important stipulations of the law, but they did not have to accept Yahweh as their God (see Wünc 2014:1145). The third sub-section (vv. 19–22) is not structured in a chiastic way, but as follows: A-B-C-D-B’-D’-C’-A’ (see Gow 1992:39). It contains the speech of Naomi (vv. 20–21) which is set into the frame of verse 19a and verse 22 (an *inclusio*), stating that Ruth and Naomi indeed arrived in Bethlehem. The sub-section itself asks the question as to the importance of Ruth for Naomi and whether or not her decision in verses 16–17 is accepted by anyone in Bethlehem (see above).

Chapter 2 – Ruth is accepted as a גַּר by Boaz

The chiastic structure of Chapter 2 centres on verses 11–12: the praise of the love and loyalty of Ruth from Boaz. As we have seen above, this actually means that Boaz acknowledged the wish of Ruth to be seen as a גַּר. He granted her the status that the law gave to a גַּר. But in going even beyond the requirements of the law (by taking her into his protection) he raises the expectation in the reader that there might be even more to Ruth than can be seen at first glance.

A survey of the three sub-sections of this chapter uncovers the development of the acceptance as a גַּר. It starts in the first sub-section (vv. 1–3) where verse 2 is the middle. This verse contains Ruth’s decision to go to the fields and glean which – as we have seen above – means that she wanted to claim the right of a גַּר for herself. The second sub-section (vv. 4–17) arranges its chiastic structure around verses 11–12, which also serves as the centre of the chapter as a whole. This very clearly shows that the whole chapter has only *one* topic: Boaz acknowledges Ruth as a גַּר. The chapter then ends with the third sub-section, verses 18–23. As was the case in Chapter 1, the

third section does not follow a strict chiasmic structure. It also uses an *inclusio* (vv. 18 and 23) stating that Ruth comes back to Naomi and goes on to live together with her. Between these verses we find a twofold dialogue between Ruth and Naomi which focuses on the theme prominent in the whole chapter, namely how Boaz granted the right of gleaning to Ruth. It adds further information in verse 20b which will become very important in the next chapter: Boaz was in fact one of their guardian-redeemers (*goel*).

Chapter 3 – Ruth qualifies herself for acceptance into the people of Israel through her טִדְנָה

The centre of Chapter 3 can be found in verses 10–11. In these verses Boaz praises the טִדְנָה of Ruth, which – as he expressly states – is well-known in all of Bethlehem. This טִדְנָה, which in the book of Ruth is only attributed to God himself (1:8) and Ruth (2:10 and 3:10), qualifies her for becoming an integral part of the people of God. It is the reason for Boaz consenting to her marriage request, combined with the buying back of Naomi’s land. This is further developed in the three sub-sections of this chapter. The first sub-section (vv. 1–8a) does not present a chiasmic structure, but develops as follows: A-B-C-D-E-B’-C’-D’. It nevertheless has a middle, which is found in verse 5 (E). This verse tells us about the willingness of Ruth to follow the plan of Naomi. Ruth understood what this plan was all about, even when the reader does not at this point really understand it. Rather, the plan is revealed to us gradually, one of the narrative skills used by the author. It is Ruth’s willingness to marry Boaz in an act of levirate marriage which leads Boaz to his praise of her טִדְנָה in verses 10–11. These verses turn out to be the central verses of the chiasmic structure of the second sub-section (vv. 8b–14a). As was the case in Chapter 2, their placement underlines the importance of these verses for the whole of the book. The third sub-section (vv. 14b–18) does have a chiasmic structure. Its focus is on verse 16, where Ruth tells Naomi about the events on the threshing floor. Naomi asks Ruth, “Who are you, my daughter?” Most translations render it “How did it go?” or something similar. But the question really goes deeper. The things that happened during this night indeed had the

potential to change the whole identity of Ruth. So the question, “Who are you?” really does make sense.²⁶ The answer to this question is “everything Boaz²⁷ had done for her”. Boaz had accepted her as a full member of the people of Israel (see above). Now the question remains as to whether the people of Bethlehem will follow him in this.

Chapter 4 – Ruth becomes an Israelite

This chapter, as previously mentioned, does not have an overall chiasmic structure. Its whole character is different. It does not divide into one introductory section, one main section and one concluding section, but gives a straightforward progression of things that happened and their meaning for the whole. In light of what has already been said one could even see Chapter 4 as a reflection of the first three chapters. While Chapter 1 presents Ruth coming into the family of Elimelech, the first sub-section in Chapter 4 presents Ruth coming into the family of Boaz. This is also made clear through the fact that the centre of the chiasmic structure of this section (v. 5) discloses that the *goel*, in releasing Naomi’s land, also has the obligation of marrying Ruth in the sense of a levirate marriage. Through this legal act the integration of Ruth into the family of the *goel* will be accomplished.

Chapter 2 shows how Ruth and Naomi experienced provision through Ruth’s acceptance by Boaz as a נָכְרָה. The second sub-section of the last chapter shows how Ruth and Naomi found “rest” in the fact that Ruth, as a full member of Israelite society and the wife of Boaz, gave birth to Obed, whose task was to care for them when they became old. The centre of the chiasmic structure of this section (vv. 14–15) underlines this. The women praise Ruth as being more important to Naomi than seven sons. The son of Ruth, Obed, will give rest to Naomi. He will renew her soul.²⁸

²⁶ The same phrase is used in different places in the Old Testament. In all instances it asks a question of identity (Wünc 1998:246). Sasson (1995:100f.) argues that the question of Naomi even goes beyond the question of mere identity and asks how the interaction with Boaz ended. Was she still (only) her daughter-in-law or did Boaz decide to marry her?

²⁷ Literally it says: “... everything the man had done for her”. The use of שְׂאֵרָה is very strange here. It seems to point to the fact that the whole night was about the question of the man and the woman.

²⁸ We find the word שׁוּב here. Obed is going to “bring back” (a *hiph’il* form of the word) the life of Naomi. This will become important later on.

Chapter 3 told us how Boaz accepted Ruth as a proselyte of the people of Israel by his readiness to marry her in the sense of a levirate marriage. The final sub-section of the book shows how God accepted Ruth into the people of Israel by making her the great-grandmother of King David. In this way Chapter 4 is the conclusion of everything in the whole book.²⁹

Therefore we can state that the whole structure of the book underlines the fact that it is about proselytism.³⁰ It shows us a woman who can be seen as a proselyte par excellence. This fact is further underlined by the second structural element we shall examine: the *Leitworte*.

The *Leitworte*

That certain Hebrew words in the Old Testament serve as *Leitworte* is an idea first formulated by Martin Buber (1964:1131). It has found widespread acceptance, especially among those theologians interested in literary structures. The German word *Leitwort* has been adopted in English as a technical term. As Bar-Efrat (2006:239) has shown, it is important to find a significantly higher number of occurrences of a certain term compared to the usual distribution of this word in order to identify it as a *Leitwort*. This can be done with great certainty in the book of Ruth.

The *Leitwort* in Chapter 1: שׁוּב

There are 12 occurrences of the word שׁוּב in the first chapter. Six times it is used in the direction of Moab (to turn back to Moab) and six times in the direction of Israel (to turn back to Israel). It occurs three more times in the remaining chapters: in 2:6 in reference to Ruth by Boaz's overseer, in 4:3 by Boaz at the gate in reference to Naomi, and finally in 4:15 where it is used figuratively for the returning of life to Naomi through her (grand-)son Obed.

²⁹ This is also true in many other respects which cannot be shown here in detail. See Wüch (1998:255).

³⁰ See also Glover (2009:294), who understands Ruth 1:16–17 as the wish of Ruth to join the people of Israel. This wish was reckoned by Boaz, then by Naomi and finally by the entire assembly (compare Mihăilă 2011:27; Zaluska 2013:174).

It has already been shown that the word שׁוּב does not only mean the literal turning back (or return) to a place where one has been before. This could not be said of Ruth, who is also said to have returned to Israel (1:22 and 2:6). It can also denote a turning away from something in the sense of leaving a wrong way or a wrong place and going to the right one. In this sense it could well be translated as “repenting” (Thompson & Martens 1996:56). In that sense Ruth has repented to the Lord, the God of Israel (and of course the God of heaven and earth).

Combined with the realisation that the central verse in Chapter 1 is Ruth’s avowal, “Your people will be my people and your God my God” (v. 16b), we can say that the first chapter of the book of Ruth speaks about the conversion of Ruth.³¹

The *Leitwort* in Chapter 2: לָקַט

The term לָקַט (“gleaning”), which means to collect things together (Rogers & Cornelius 1996:817-818), is used 12 times in Chapter 2 (and nowhere else in the book), only in reference to Ruth (the work of the harvesters is described with the word קָצַר). In the same sense לָקַט is used for the Israelites collecting the manna (e.g., Exod 16:4, 5, 16). In the law regulating the provision of the poor, widows, orphans and strangers it is also forbidden for the landowners to collect everything. They must leave the leftovers for the poor (e.g., Lev 19:9, 10; 23:22). This *Leitwort* sets the motif for Chapter 2: provision. The provision is a result of the fact that Ruth indeed was accepted as a גֵּר, because only then would she fall under the legislation of the law.

The *Leitwort* in Chapter 3: שָׁכַב

The term שָׁכַב (“lie down”, Williams 1996:101) is used eight times in Chapter 3 (and nowhere else in the book): four times in reference to Boaz lying down and four times in reference to Ruth. It therefore sets the motif of this chapter: lying down. It would be

³¹ It is not clear whether one can already speak of proselytism here because this is a very private and personal avowal of Ruth. Only her mother-in-law Naomi could testify to it. We should not forget that the whole story takes place in the time of the Judges where there could not be any “formal” proselytism simply because there was no central jurisdiction in Israel.

insufficient to think of it only in terms of literally lying down. In all of this we see the greater motif of finding rest, which is expressed by Naomi first in 1:9 and then again in 3:1. In these contexts, to “find rest” means to find a place in the house of a husband which offers security and future to a woman.³² The term therefore refers to marriage into the family of Boaz, which indeed is behind the whole scene on the threshing floor. While the *Leitwort* in Chapter 2 speaks about provision (as a רָא), the *Leitwort* in Chapter 3 indicates the final rest Ruth was going to find as the wife of Boaz (of course implying that she was accepted as a convert and therefore as an Israelite).

The *Leitwort* in Chapter 4: לְקַדֵּם

This term already turned up once in Chapter 2 (v. 20) and seven times in Chapter 3 (vv. 9, 12, 13). In Chapter 4 we find it 13 times. If we take the book as a whole, we can say that לְקַדֵּם (“redeem, deliver, ransom”, Hubbard 1996:789) can be seen as the most prominent keyword. Without going into too much depth here³³ we can say that it was the main responsibility of a *goel* to step into the place of an unable close relative. This would be the case, for example, when a relative was poor and had to sell his land or himself as a slave, or in certain legal situations in the courts where someone was not able to plead his case alone, or when a relative is murdered and someone must deal with the revenge (Wünc 1998:29–31).

In Chapter 4 the word לְקַדֵּם is used 12 times in the negotiation between Boaz and the other *goel* at the gates and then once again in verse 14, where Obed is called a *goel* for Naomi by redeeming her future. Although the term itself is never used in respect to Ruth, she is the agent through whom the redemption comes. The redeeming of the land was inseparably connected with the levirate marriage with Ruth. Through this

³² Some scholars understand the whole scene at the threshing floor in a more sexual sense. Sasson (1995:66f.), for example, thinks that the marriage between Boaz and Ruth was actually consummated on this night. Hamlin (1996:41) remarks that the modern reader would be astonished to see how far the uncovering of the “feet” of Boaz really went. I do not follow these interpretations (see Wünc 1998:213–215), but it does not have a direct consequence on the understanding of רָא as referring to the rest Ruth is going to find in her relationship with Boaz.

³³ Hubbard (1991:4–5) has shown in detail the functions a *goel* could have in Israel.

marriage finally came the redemption of Naomi (in the person of her grandson Obed).

One could therefore put it like this: The conversion of Ruth (רֹוּת) in Chapter 1 was accepted by Boaz. This led to the provision Ruth and Naomi found through the gleaning (לְקַט) in the fields of Boaz in Chapter 2. Ruth's further proof of loyalty and love led to the readiness of Boaz to accept the offer of the levirate marriage (to lie down – שָׁכַב – under the “wing” of Boaz) and finally to the redemption (לְגַאֲלָה) of the whole situation: the land was returned to the family of Naomi, Ruth was married to Boaz, and Naomi's future was secured through her (grand-) son Obed. And all of this ends with the prospect of the great King David. In this sense the whole book speaks about the successful conversion of Ruth the Moabite, to Ruth the great-grandmother of David.

CONCLUSIONS

We have considered the book of Ruth from different angles. We started with an analysis of the Jewish exegesis of this book. It was demonstrated that Targum, Midrash and Talmud unanimously present the book as a model for proselytism and Ruth herself as the proselyte par excellence.

We then asked whether or not this could also be verified exegetically in the book itself. This led to the conclusion that one of the main topics (if not the most prominent) of the book seems to be the conversion of Ruth to the people of Israel. This must be seen as a process, starting with the very personal statement of Ruth in 1:16–17. It was a statement of loyalty to Naomi, which included also the people and God of Naomi in this loyalty.

This personal statement of loyalty then was first accepted by Naomi and then by Boaz (making Ruth a person who had the rights of a גֵּר) and finally led to a full integration of Ruth into the people of Israel through the elders of Bethlehem (legal aspect) and the women of the city (social aspect).

Finally we examined the structural elements, which are so prominent in the book and make it one of the most highly developed pieces of Jewish literature in the Old

Testament. The structural elements (chiastic structure and *Leitworte*) added to the understanding of the book of Ruth as a book on proselytism, showing that Ruth can indeed be understood as a proselyte *par excellence*.

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