

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Agricultural Dimensions of the Book of Ruth

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Theology and Religious Studies
Of The Catholic University of America
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

©

Copyright

All Rights Reserved

By

Timothy Curtis Snow

Washington, D.C.

2016

Agricultural Dimensions of the Book of Ruth

Timothy Curtis Snow, Ph.D.

Director: Robert D. Miller II, Ph.D.

Food, essential for life, plays a prominent role in the Book of Ruth. It serves as the prime motivation for Elimelech's migration to Moab from Bethlehem, the "house of bread." Upon Naomi's return migration to Bethlehem, agriculture provides a safety net for her and Ruth, as well as to those with no other means of support, namely the widows, orphans, and aliens. This dissertation investigates farming and ecological practices, including agricultural motivations for migration in order to understand the background of the story of Ruth and the book itself.

After a summary of previous scholarship, the focus turns upon the migration of Elimelech and his family during a time of severe famine and the return migration of Naomi, accompanied by Ruth (Ruth 1:1-6). Here, drought and famine are examined as well as the role they play in a decision to migrate to another land. Next, I examined the agricultural process and the role it plays in Ruth 2:4-17, 23 (harvest) and 3:6-13 (threshing). Pertinent archaeological evidence was brought to bear. Finally, the effects of migration, farming, and ecology on the plight of the orphan, widow, and alien were examined. In an agriculture-based system of taking care of the less fortunate, the fortunes of the poor are often interconnected with the success or failure of the farmer's crop.

Five main conclusions were drawn from this study. First, migration was seen as a viable alternative to starvation in the event of a prolonged famine. Because of a farmer's fear of losing his property and his livelihood, this option was seen as a last resort. Second, when the primary

means of support, the “breadwinner,” disappears, survivors are likely to engage in return migration, especially if they receive news that the famine has ended in their homeland as in the case of Naomi (Ruth 1:6). Third, the farmer is at the mercy of natural phenomena, such as weather, pests, and plant diseases. This was made manifest at the beginning of the Book of Ruth. Fourth, if natural circumstances cooperate, the farmer’s skill, from plowing to harvest, has a direct bearing on the success or failure of a given crop year. The farmer also practices ecological skills such as soil conservation through terracing and nutrient conservation by means of fallowing and crop rotation. Finally, the fortunes of the farmer and the poor are intertwined, provided the farmer abides by legislation in the law codes (Covenant, Holiness, and Deuteronomic). Boaz is an exceptional exemplar in his generosity toward Ruth.

This dissertation by Timothy Curtis Snow fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Biblical Studies approved by Robert D. Miller II, Ph.D., as Director, and by Christopher Begg, S.T.D., Ph.D., and David A. Bosworth, Ph.D. as Readers.

Robert D. Miller II, Ph.D.

Christopher T. Begg, S.T.D., Ph.D.

David A. Bosworth, Ph.D.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter One: A Review of the Literature	1
A. The Agricultural Element in Scholarship on the Book of Ruth	2
1. Early Jewish Interpretation	2
2. Contemporary Approaches.....	3
B. Agricultural Scholarship on the ANE Agriculture	25
C. Conclusion.....	34
Chapter Two	36
A. An Exegesis of Ruth 1:1-6	36
B. Famine in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Ruth	43
1. Causes	45
2. Evidence.....	46
3. Other Evidence.....	50
4. Effects	51
5. Mitigation Strategies	51
C. Migration in the Ancient World	55
1. Conditions Leading to Migration.....	56
2. Types of Migration.....	57
D. Conclusion	59

Chapter Three	61
A. An Exegesis of Ruth 2:4-17, 23	61
B. The Agricultural Cycle from Plowing to Harvest	69
1. Rainfall.....	70
2. Plowing	70
3. Planting	72
4. Tilling and Weeding	73
5. Harvest.....	73
C. An Exegesis of Ruth 3:6-14	74
D. The Agricultural Cycle from Threshing through Processing	81
1. Winnowing.....	82
2. Storage.....	82
3. Processing	84
4. Mitigation Strategies	86
E. Conclusion.....	90
Chapter Four	92
A. Migration and the Poor	93
B. Agriculture and the Fortunes of the Poor	96
1. The Farmer's Interconnectedness with the Fortunes of the Poor.....	97
C. Conclusions.....	100
D. Subjects for Further Study	103
Bibliography	104

List of Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this dissertation are according to the “Instructions for Contributors to the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly (CBQ)*.”

Acknowledgements

I would be remiss to submit this dissertation without thanking those who made its completion possible. First, I thank my committee for their willingness to serve, beginning with my dissertation director, Dr. Robert Miller II for his guidance, feedback, and encouragement from my selection of its topic to completion. I also appreciate Fr. Christopher Begg's attention to detail and his unfailing editorial hand. Any mistakes that remain are my own. I value Dr. David Bosworth's feedback on the content of my dissertation. His seminar in Megilloth provided a genesis for this study.

I also thank Dr. Gerald L. Mattingly, for whom I served as Photographer at Khirbat al-Mudaybi in ancient Moab, as well as the late Drs. Willard W. Winter and Reuben G. Bullard for cultivating my interest in ANE archaeology. I appreciate their friendship and encouragement. I also thank the late Fr. Francis Gignac for his encouragement and friendship during my time at CUA.

Ultimately, I thank my wife, Laurie, for being a fellow-traveler throughout this process. She has been a constant source of encouragement during my high points and low points. Truly she is my *אשת חיל*.

CHAPTER ONE

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The quest for food plays a prominent role in the Book of Ruth. It serves as the primary motivation for Elimelech's migration to Moab (Ruth 1:1) as well as for Naomi and Ruth's return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6). After their return, agriculture provides a safety net for their sustenance since they have no other means of support as childless widows and foreigners. Although numerous studies examined the Book of Ruth in terms of legal traditions,¹ agriculture has not adequately been considered in previous studies of the Book of Ruth even though farming practices such as harvesting, gleaning, and threshing occupy a significant part of the book.

¹Legal issues such as taking care of the poor, levirate marriage, and land redemption present themselves in the book of Ruth. Some examples of what have been done in these areas include: David L. Baker, "To Glean or Not to Glean . . .," *ExpTim* 117 (2006) 406-10; Charles P. Bayless, "Naomi in the Book of Ruth in Light of the Mosaic Covenant," *BibSac* 161 (2004) 413-31; Joshua Berman, "Ancient Hermeneutics and the Legal Structure of the Book of Ruth," *ZAW* 119 (2007) 22-38; Calum M. Carmichael, "A Ceremonial Crux: Removing a Man's Sandal as a Female Gesture of Contempt," *JBL* 96 (1977) 321-36; George Dargo, "Deriving Law from the Biblical Narrative: the Book of Ruth," *New England Law Review* 40 (2006) 351-60; Russell J. Hendel, "Ruth: The Legal Code for the Law of Kindness," *JBQ* 36 (2008) 254-260; Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing, 1974); Agnethe Siquans, "Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Woman to be Integrated into Israel," *JBL* 128 (2009) 443-52; and Thomas Thompson and Dorothy Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth," *VT* 18 (1968) 79-99.

Even though the place of agriculture in the book has not been adequately considered, there has been progress in using data from other disciplines in understanding more fully the Book of Ruth. Pursuing this direction, this literature review will make note of agricultural studies, especially in the context of the Near East, which range from Gustav Dalman's observations of Palestinian agriculture in the early 20th century to seminal works of Oded Borowski and David Hopkins in the mid-1980's to Bruce Routledge's dissertation in the 1990's. Though not related directly to the Book of Ruth, the agricultural works surveyed here will provide the necessary background for this dissertation. In the following, I shall first survey the agricultural element in scholarship on the Book of Ruth, beginning with early Jewish interpretation through contemporary scholarship. Following that, general agricultural scholarship of the Levant will be surveyed, paying particular attention to that scholarship's references to the Book of Ruth.

The Agricultural Element in Scholarship on the Book of Ruth

Early Jewish Interpretation

Earliest attempts at interpretation of the Book of Ruth show that background issues such as agriculture and ecology were not a priority. For example, Jewish interpretation in Targum Ruth² was concerned with making the Book of Ruth harmonize with law codes that addressed the events that occurs in the Ruth story. Therefore, Mahlon and Chilion were condemned for marrying Moabite women, thus attributing their premature deaths to those marriages (1:5), even though one of these women, Ruth, was the hero of the story. The writers of the Targum have

²See D. R. G. Beattie, "The Targum of Ruth: Translation with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes," in *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, Vol. 19 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 1-34.

Ruth becoming a proselyte later in chapter one during her interchange with Naomi (1:16-17). The interpretation in *Ruth Rabbah* indicted Elimelech for moving his family from Bethlehem to Moab. The author(s) of *Ruth Rabbah* attributed this act to Elimelech's greed, which led to his abandonment of his land and people. Both Targum and *Ruth Rabbah*³ read the story of Ruth, especially in 1:1-6, as one of sin and retribution.

Contemporary Approaches

Series of Exchanges between Campbell and Sasson. With contributions from other disciplines, the exegetical focus in more recent studies began to incorporate background issues, including geography, agriculture, archaeology, and their contribution to a better knowledge of the Book of Ruth. For example, Edward Campbell spent time discussing the location of Moab, especially where Elimelech and his family might have sojourned during their time away from Bethlehem. Factors that went into their decision would have included travel distance as well as arable farmland where wheat and/or barley could be grown. Campbell concluded that they most likely would have gone north of the Wadi Mujib (the biblical Arnon River) because of more convenient travel routes and greater quantity of arable farmland available.⁴ It should be noted that farmland suitable for wheat and barley crops can also be found to the south of the Wadi Mujib;

³See Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Ruth Rabbah and Esther Rabbah I* (Studies in Ancient Judaism 6; Lanham, MD / New York / Oxford: University Press of America, 2001) 13-14. *Ruth Rabbah* (Parashah Two) to 1:5 states that injury is not done to human beings first, but penalty is exacted for property. If the sinner does not repent, he or she suffers the consequences. Later, on page 55, it is stated that the sin of Israel caused the famine, and Elimelech was punished because he broke the heart of Israel.

⁴See Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 7; New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1975) 50-52.

however, the climate becomes less hospitable even farther south and east. Regarding the farming and storing of the cereal grains, Campbell also cited archaeological data at Gezer – not only the Gezer calendar but also the granary found in the acropolis containing approximately 4 ft. of charred wheat and barley. He cited additional examples of charred debris at Tell el-Hesi, Lachish, Shechem, and Dothan, dated to the 12th century B.C.E. or earlier.

Literarily, Campbell categorizes the Book of Ruth as a short story. He compliments the skill of the storyteller whose knowledge and craft help weave the story of Ruth into a realistic work. Throughout the work, several literary devices are evident, including inclusios, chiasms, symmetry of design, and word-plays. Campbell's literary approach to Ruth involved modifying the theory of Millman Parry and Albert Lord which tried to explain Homeric sagas as having originated as oral compositions rather than as traditional written works.⁵ Campbell admitted that even though the songs the Hebrew "singers" sang did not include all the elements cited by Parry and Lord, they did include aids that facilitated memory, e. g., inclusios, stock phrases and formulas, greetings, blessing forms, and vow expressions. However, as Jack Sasson pointed out, Parry and Lord's theories have been questioned.⁶

⁵The theory is explained in Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (2nd ed.; Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press, 2000). Campbell summarizes Parry and Lord's research in the discussion on "The Hebrew Singer of Tales" section on p. 19 of his commentary as follows: Oral tales in Parry and Lord are comprised of four ingredients – "a combination of formulas, a standard line length, performance to the accompaniment of a simple musical instrument, and a basic plot skeleton which kept the story the 'same' even as new ornamentation was included."

⁶See Jack M. Sasson, "Divine Providence or Human Plan?" *Int* 30 (1976) 416. For example, he notes that pen-and-ink writers such as Lucretius and Livy prove to be much more formulaic than Homer or Hesiod. He also takes issue with Campbell's assertion on page 22 of his commentary that Levites would have disseminated divine instruction.

Within the same decade of the 1970s, Jack Sasson penned his commentary on the book of Ruth, drawing on Vladimir Propp's original model of the folktale in 19th century Russia.

Sasson's judgement of the relevance of this model for ancient Near Eastern texts raises the question of how well the original Hebrew of the Book of Ruth fits Propp's scheme of the Russian folktale.⁷ While treating Ruth using folkloristic terminology, Sasson refrains from trying to extract from the book of Ruth information of legal or theological import.

Sasson's organization of his work is a bit curious, with much of the background material in the third section, after the translation and the philological commentary. However, there is much good material including the background of Propp's model, which I alluded to just previously. He also has an in-depth discussion of word-plays in the Book of Ruth. Many of these word-plays will be discussed later in this study. He asserts that the Book of Ruth, with its highly-polished narrative style and rich Hebrew vocabulary and idiom, was written for a highly educated audience who could respond well to patterns encoded within the folktale.⁸ The audience would also have been educated on the value of cadence and word-play in their individual and collective memory. This is especially true of the book's *Leitworte*, a literary device intended to organize a spoken narrative by constantly stimulating an audience's memory.

In Sasson's discussion of legal and social practices preserved in the book of Ruth, he rightly states that Ruth tells us nothing about levirate marriage.⁹ Strictly speaking, what happened

⁷Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore / London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) xiii.

⁸Sasson, *Ruth*, 225.

⁹Sasson, *Ruth*, 229.

between Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:13) did not constitute a true levirate marriage as envisioned in the Deuteronomic law code (Deut 25:5-6). Manifestly, their marriage involved an exceptional case of marrying a near kin, but it is impossible to know if this relationship represented a levirate marriage. Sasson contends that two separate acts happened on the threshing floor: Ruth asked Boaz for marriage for herself, and she asked for redemption of land on behalf of Naomi. This proposal is based on Sasson's assumption that levirate marriage was not part of the equation in the case of Ruth and Boaz; therefore the question of redemption pertained only to Naomi. However, we do not know precisely how an Israelite widow would have inherited land, whether it be from her husband or her sons. In the Book of Ruth, Sasson also noted evidence of the trickster motif, usually involving a hero, an ancestor, or a venerated personality who circumvents the rules.¹⁰ This becomes evident in the scheme cooked up by Naomi to get Boaz to marry Ruth as well as Boaz's maneuvering in his encounter with the anonymous near relation (hereafter referred as Mr. So-and-So) over the redemption of Elimelech's land.

Sasson discusses agriculture frequently in his commentary on the Book of Ruth in connection with those parts of the story that called for such treatment. He also draws upon liturgical uses of the book as it was read on the first day of *Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks, the festival which marked the end of the wheat harvest. Appropriately, Ruth and Naomi are said to have entered Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, and Ruth convinces Boaz to do

¹⁰Sasson (*Ruth*, 230-32) further illustrated the trickster motif, which is well-represented in biblical literature. Prominent figures who engaged in trickster practices include Abraham (Gen 12:10-20; 20), Isaac who is both a trickster (Gen 26:1-11) and was himself later tricked by Rebekkah into blessing Jacob (Genesis 27). Jacob, in turn, tricked Esau into surrendering his birthright (Gen 25:29-34), and was later tricked by Laban (Gen 29:22-26).

his duty as kinsman at the end of the barley harvest.¹¹ Sasson also makes reference to the Gezer Calendar, which dates the barley harvest to the 8th month (April/May), and the wheat harvest to May/June.¹²

In his commentary proper, Sasson briefly introduces the agricultural significance of Bethlehem which is reflected in the etymological meaning of the site name as the “house of bread.” This reference appears at least as early as the Amarna period (2nd millennium B.C.E.). The phrase “fields of Moab” denotes the territory of Moab, but is not necessarily a reference to the fertility of the land unless indicated by the context.¹³ With reference to Ruth’s setting out to find a place to glean, Sasson’s discussion turns to land allotments among Bethlehem’s citizens. When land or usage rights (usufruct) to a field were sold, in addition to boundaries formed by rivers, ditches, canals, and so forth, land contracts situate the field in question by enumerating the names of the owners of adjacent plots.¹⁴ Land ownership and usage will be further illustrated when I discuss Guillaume’s work below. Sasson also discussed what harvesters ate, citing the reference to the harvesters eating roasted grain in the Book of Ruth (2:14). Roasting would crack the kernels to make the grain easier to consume. Alternatively, the grain could also be left to dry on the roofs of houses.¹⁵

¹¹Sasson, *Ruth*, 12-13.

¹²Sasson, *Ruth*, 38.

¹³Sasson, *Ruth*, 15-16.

¹⁴Sasson, *Ruth*, 45.

¹⁵Sasson, *Ruth*, 56.

When discussing Ruth 3, Sasson discusses the process of winnowing. Curiously, he does not discuss the process of threshing which preceded winnowing. He raised pertinent questions such as, did the owner normally watch his grain pile himself, or did he hire someone as a guard? If the latter was the case, what was Boaz doing at the threshing floor? Was he exercising a ceremonial or cultic role associated with the end of the harvest? Also, why would one consume copious amounts of food and drink before taking one's position to guard the grain?¹⁶ Questions Sasson also raises concern the amount of grain Boaz gave Ruth after their threshing floor encounter as well as the normal amount of grain given at betrothal.¹⁷

The ultimate interchange between Campbell and Sasson culminated in the former's "Ruth Revisited" chapter in George Landes' *Festschrift*.¹⁸ Campbell not only responds to Sasson, but also reconsiders his own thinking on the Book of Ruth. He points out nine "divergencies" between his and Sasson's positions. The first divergence concerns whether Naomi's argument in Ruth 1:12, 13 is related to the levirate practice or not. Sasson takes Naomi's hyperbolic speculations as not referring to levirate marriage, while Campbell holds that Naomi's speech, though distinct from levirate marriage that we have in the Bible, does allude to a levirate-type responsibility.¹⁹ In chapter one, Naomi is concerned with the well-being of her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah. It is evident that land redemption was not on Naomi's mind at this point in the

¹⁶Sasson, *Ruth*, 65.

¹⁷Sasson, *Ruth*, 96-98.

¹⁸Edward F. Campbell, "Ruth Revisited," in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* (ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999) 57-76.

¹⁹Campbell, "Ruth Revisited," 56-57.

narrative. Marriage and land redemption was not discussed until it was broached in chapter four at the city gate.

The second of their differences concerns the “nature of the sentence” in the first verse of chapter two.²⁰ Those of the folklorist school do not regard connective verses as an aside to the audience because, in their view, everything should serve to advance the story. Alternatively, one can claim that Ruth 2:1 indeed serves to provide an explanation to the audience of what is happening, as Campbell asserts.²¹ He further states that the verse is not formulated grammatically as an element of the story because of its disjunctive syntax.²² The questions here are, “Did Ruth know about Boaz previously?” and if so, “Did she search specifically for Boaz’s plot?”

The third of Campbell’s divergencies with Sasson regards the significance of the *kethib/qere* alternatives in 2:1. Sasson chooses the *qere* מִיֶּדַע, which refers to Boaz as an acquaintance who is someone well-known in the community. Campbell opts for a more specific rendering “covenant brother” by his choice of the *kethib* מִיֶּדָּע.²³ In either case, the author of Ruth would be saying something about the relationship between Boaz and the widows Naomi and Ruth, whether or not he chose to be more general or more specific about that relationship.

Their fourth divergence revolves around whether Ruth set out specifically to find Boaz’s plot or whether she happened upon it while searching for an opportunity to glean so she and

²⁰Campbell, “Ruth Revisited,” 58.

²¹Campbell, “Ruth Revisited,” 58-59.

²²Campbell, “Ruth Revisited,” 58.

²³Campbell, “Ruth Revisited,” 59.

Naomi might eat. Sasson posits that Ruth set out specifically to find Boaz's plot. This is connected to his making 2:1 part of the storyline rather than as an aside for the benefit of the reader.

The fifth divergence centers upon the question of whether Ruth specifically wanted to impress Boaz, and if so, on what level. Unquestionably, Ruth gains Boaz's favor, and as time goes on, he becomes more aware of her. The question here is Ruth's motive, or the lack of one. Sasson holds that Ruth contrived to have the overseer introduce her to Boaz so he might take note of her. Campbell in his commentary sees Ruth as artless in the whole process, but he was ready to partially alter this view by the time he wrote "Ruth Revisited."²⁴ Campbell partially accepts Sasson's emphasis upon calculated movements by Ruth while also seeing Boaz and Ruth proceeding step-by-step in their relationship. He does not go so far as to say that Ruth was trying to entrap Boaz (or *vice versa*).

The sixth divergence revolves around the question of whether Ruth was making one request or two on the threshing floor.²⁵ Sasson makes a distinction between what Ruth wants for herself and what she wants for her mother-in-law, Naomi, such that the issues of marriage for Ruth and land-redemption for Naomi are kept apart, even while appearing in parallel. Correspondingly, Boaz responds to each part of Ruth's request. Campbell's position is more traditional than that of Sasson, keeping marriage and land-redemption together in the one request Ruth makes of Boaz.

²⁴Campbell, "Ruth Revisited," 60.

²⁵Campbell, "Ruth Revisited," 61.

The seventh divergence, that is, whether or not sexual intercourse occurred on the threshing floor, is based more on Sasson's reading of the Ruth story by Adrien Bledstein rather than any disagreement with Sasson himself.²⁶ Bledstein contended that Ruth and Boaz got married at the threshing floor via intercourse as stated in *m. Qid.* 1:1.²⁷ Therefore, by the time of the scene at the city gate in Ruth 4, Boaz and Ruth were already married. Mr. So-and-So is portrayed as a no-good rascal who acts similarly to Onan in Genesis 38 by not performing his duty of impregnating Ruth. Campbell found Bledstein's assertions intriguing, but not persuasive.

As to divergencies eight and nine, the ninth is more consequential, involving as it does a choice between the *kethib* (קְנִיָּה) and the *qere* (קְנִיָּה), that makes a significant difference in the way Ruth 4:5 reads. The traditional reading of the *kethib* requires Mr. So-and-So to acquire Ruth as a condition for redeeming Naomi's plot, but the reading of the *qere* (advocated by Sasson and others) has Boaz making the statement that he has already acquired Ruth. Campbell now finds Sasson's reading compelling, since this most plausibly explains why the unidentified kinsman-redeemer would end up backing out on his promise

²⁶Campbell, "Ruth Revisited," 60. Campbell references Adrien Bledstein's "Female Companionships: If the Book of Ruth Were Written by a Woman . . .," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993) 116-33.

²⁷See Lawrence H. Schiffman, ed., *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1997) 720-21 maintains that a spouse could be acquired by the act of intercourse.

after initially accepting the task of redemption of Naomi's land. Of the nine divergencies, Campbell thus concedes to Sasson on one, five, seven, eight, and nine.

Green - Field and Seed Symbolism. Barbara Green's dissertation on Ruth uses the "seed-field" symbol as an entry point to understanding the book in light of agriculture and the human condition. According to her, "seed" carries the male aspect while "field" carries the female aspect.²⁸ This symbolism is transposed from the agricultural plane of growing crops to the human level of providing a progeny for the union of Boaz and Ruth. She makes much of the "field aspect" in her elucidation of three fields: "fields of Moab" which emphasizes Ruth's foreignness and the anomaly of her "return," "Boaz's field" which provides food for Ruth and Naomi as well as for their other needs, and "Elimelech's field" which comes into play in chapter four of the Book of Ruth.²⁹ Green also compares Ruth to the Iroquois Corn Goddess stories; however, no real discussion of agriculture in the book appears in her work. Instead, agriculture provides a jumping-off point for a discussion of symbolism in the Book of Ruth.

Hubbard and Bush. Robert Hubbard's commentary on the book of Ruth refers to agriculture, in both its text and footnotes, in his quest to better understand the story.

²⁸Barbara Gail Green, *A Study of Field and Seed Symbolism in the Biblical Story of Ruth* Ph.D. diss (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1980) 14.

²⁹Green, *Study*, 67-68.

Hubbard cleverly illustrated the irony of the “house of bread” in the time of famine and its relation to the “fields of Moab” where Elimelech and his family migrate to escape agricultural catastrophe.³⁰ Assuming that the tribe of Reuben was still occupying land to the north of the *Wadi Mujib*, he locates Moab to the south of the wadi.³¹ This is a possible location of Moab, as evidenced by the fact that grain is grown in modern times just to the south of the *Wadi Mujib*,³² but the crop-growing capacity diminishes to the south and to the east as rainfall decreases, making agriculture less remunerative. However, Dibon, the capital of the Moabite territory, is located to the north of the *Wadi Mujib*. This fact, combined with the fact that all the land allotted to the various tribes was not fully occupied, makes it more likely that Moab also extended some distance to the north of the wadi. If this is the case, Moab would have possessed additional arable land as evidenced by its highly-organized agricultural production, this reflected by a large quantity of carbonized wheat found in the region.³³

³⁰Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 86, n. 16.

³¹Hubbard, *Ruth*, 87.

³²I visited Khirbat Balua, located south of the *Wadi Mujib*, during the grain harvest in 2009 and 2011 where I witnessed women harvesting the grain.

³³Hubbard, *Ruth*, 87, n. 19.

Hubbard rightly notes that the agricultural calendar is used in the Book of Ruth to indicate chronological sign posts, such as Naomi and Ruth's arrival to Bethlehem taking place at the beginning of the barley harvest, approximately April/May according to the Gezer calendar. The wheat harvest would follow in about two weeks. From the Gezer calendar, we get a picture that the grain harvest would last approximately seven weeks from April to June.³⁴ This would have been a sufficient time period for Ruth to glean enough cereal grains to sustain herself and Naomi through the rest of the year. He also discusses the apportionment of plots of land. Boundary markers for such plots included streams, ditches, other natural phenomena as well as adjacent plots of land which were known by the names of their owners/tenants. Hubbard guides readers through the process of reaping, rightly noting that gleaning was a mere subsistence process, and was not necessarily the most productive way of obtaining food.³⁵

Hubbard raises the issue of whether Ruth's request to glean among the sheaves exceeded conventions for gleaning found in the law codes.³⁶ If this is the case, the unusualness of Ruth's request may explain why the foreman did not respond, as he would

³⁴Hubbard, *Ruth*, 130.

³⁵Hubbard, *Ruth*, 138.

³⁶Hubbard, *Ruth*, 148.

have known the conventions according to the law codes, which were passed on at least orally at the time. Hubbard rightly notes barley can grow better in poorer soil than wheat, which raises the question of how agricultural tracts would have been apportioned to reflect this fact. He also briefly discusses the practice of roasting grain for consumption by the workers.³⁷

Hubbard also discusses the process of threshing and winnowing. A threshing floor would either be an area of exposed bedrock or of hard-packed earth. Grain would be beaten by a sledge, trampled by animal hooves, or crushed under cart wheels to remove the husks from the kernels. Then the grain would be thrown into the air by means of either a fork or shovel. The wind would carry away the chaff while the grain would fall near the winnower. The kernels would be collected into piles. Hubbard posits that the threshing floor was located downhill from the town, in part, so as to regulate the velocity of the wind.³⁸

Bush's references to agriculture are not as plentiful as Hubbard's, but he does utilize Borowski's and Dalman's works (to be discussed below). However, he extensively discussed land tenure, especially the usufruct practice associated with Elimelech. His best contribution is his excursus about the nature of the transaction proposed by Boaz in Ruth

³⁷Hubbard, *Ruth*, 174, n. 24.

³⁸Hubbard, *Ruth*, 200-201.

4.³⁹ In his view, two possible scenarios may be in play here. In the first, Elimelech sold his usufruct before migrating to Moab, thus making what happens in chapter four a case of redemption. In the second, Elimelech kept possession of his usufruct, such that Naomi had the rights to it upon Elimelech's death, making the subsequent land transaction a case of pre-emption. Bush opts for the first scenario, arguing that Naomi since had no means to redeem the usufruct, it had to be redeemed on her behalf.⁴⁰ Thus מָכַר would mean to “dispose of (the rights to)” the land, and קָנָה should be rendered to “acquire (the rights to)” the parcel of land. מְכָרָהּ is taken by Bush as an “instantaneous perfect,” referring to Naomi's disposing of her right.⁴¹ His view is that this disposition of land reflects either a performative perfect (Naomi is disposing of her right) or a perfect of resolve (Naomi intends to dispose of her right). Alternatively, Elimelech would have sold his usufruct if it were not his intention to return to Bethlehem at the cessation of the famine. There is, however, no evidence, at least in the text, that he had no intention of returning to Bethlehem from Moab.

Fewell and Gunn. Danna Fewell and David Gunn attempt a retelling of the Ruth story. In their view, such retelling helps pull readers into the critical process in which they are encouraged to “read between the texts,” comparing their text with the biblical one.⁴² Afterwards,

³⁹Frederic Bush, *Ruth/Esther* (WBC 9; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996) 211-15.

⁴⁰Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 214.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990) 19.

the two authors gave their justification for their retelling. They touch somewhat on the matter of economic dependence in regard to widows in general, and Naomi and Ruth in particular.⁴³

Otherwise, agriculture is not a concern in their retelling.

Zenger. Zenger's commentary spends some time on the geography of Bethlehem, locating it 8 km. to the south of Jerusalem in the Judean hill country. It is situated on a gray limestone ridge, with shallow depressions, gentle slopes, small valleys, and fertile *terra rosa* soil. The average rainfall in the area is 550 mm. (21.7"), good enough to grow a typical grain crop. A successful crop depends on the amount and timing of the rainfall.⁴⁴ As he notes, the rainy season runs from October/November to April/May in Palestine, with the rest of the time being the dry season. Rainfall was not always constant because it does not necessarily cover the same regions with the same amounts. Therefore, one area might have a successful crop, while a nearby area would be experiencing drought, like what is depicted in the Book of Ruth. While rainfall below the minimums over a year may cause drought, the timing of rainfall is also crucial. For example, lack of rain at the beginning of the growing season may affect either when a crop can be planted, or the health of seedlings that have already been planted. The lack of rainfall at crucial points in the growth cycle may affect the yield of that year's crop.⁴⁵

Nielsen. Kirsten Nielsen discusses the plausibility of Moab as a place of refuge from the famine in Bethlehem, the "house of food." This moniker is indicative of Bethlehem's reputation

⁴³Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 12.

⁴⁴Erich Zenger, *Das Buch Ruth* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 8; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992) 29.

⁴⁵Zenger, *Ruth*, 30.

as a breadbasket in good times as well as its ironic status in times of famine.⁴⁶ She also discusses the significance of the threshing floor,⁴⁷ not only in its agricultural use, but also as a venue for festivities and fertility rites of harvest celebration.⁴⁸ According to her, there is no indication in the text whether or not Ruth's venture to the threshing floor was connected to such a festival.

Sakenfeld. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld's commentary on Ruth spends some time on food-related migration, exploring some biblical precedents for the migration as described, as well as noting that food-related migration still happens in modern times. She rightly points out the small margin of error between years of productive crops and years of famine. On one hand, I would dispute her assertion that long-term grain storage was not a practical reality in ancient times, however.⁴⁹ Even though ancient farmers did not have the advantage of modern techniques of food preservation, there is evidence of the use of rudimentary techniques, such as scorching grain to prevent it from spouting, as I will discuss later. On the other hand, she is correct about the flimsy nature of the safety net that existed in Ruth's time.⁵⁰ The problem of economic survival did not go away despite Boaz's generosity to Ruth during her gleaning endeavor. Clearly, gleaning was only a short-term solution, as further evidenced by Naomi's concern to find a long-term solution for Ruth by encouraging her marriage to Boaz.

⁴⁶Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 41-42.

⁴⁷Nielsen, *Ruth*, 67.

⁴⁸See Hos 9:1.

⁴⁹Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 18.

⁵⁰Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 46.

Sakenfeld asserts that it is possible to delay winnowing of the first crop (barley) until the urgency of successful harvesting of the second crop (wheat) had eased with the aid of techniques for protecting the barley harvest against weather, insects, and rodents. She notes that this practice persists in the modern Middle East today. Thus, the timing of the barley and wheat harvests in the book of Ruth is plausible.⁵¹ In the case of Ruth 4, she discusses the complexities of inheritance and transfer of land that Naomi faced.⁵²

LaCocque. André LaCocque's treatment of the book of Ruth acknowledges its backdrop as "an agrarian-based economy based on production capabilities, distribution, and consumption in the restricted framework of the משפחה ("family, clan).⁵³ Relying on Maxwell Miller's description of Moab, LaCocque assumes that northern Moab, north of the Wadi Mujib (extending as far north as Heshbon), was more accessible to the outside world, as well as being better known to the biblical writers, than was southern Moab.⁵⁴ Therefore, Elimelech and his family would have most likely settled north of the Wadi Mujib. He also touches on the "fields of Moab" reference, which appears six times in the Book of Ruth, five times in chapter one alone. By comparison, Gen 36:35 references the "field (שדע) of Moab," while the Num 22:1 refers to the "plains (ערבות) of Moab."

⁵¹Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 52.

⁵²Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 70-74.

⁵³André LaCocque, *Ruth* (A Continental Commentary; trans. K. C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 21-22. This commentary was originally published in French under the title *Le Livre de Ruth* (CAT 17; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2004).

⁵⁴LaCocque, *Ruth*, 35 references Maxwell Miller, "Moab," in *ABD* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4: 882-83.

LaCocque correctly notes that gleaning was only a short-term solution for the poor, such as Naomi and Ruth. Given the fact that Ruth was gleaning for the two of them, she appears as a determined woman of great courage. Long-term survival would depend on marriage and land-redemption. LaCocque also discusses other than strictly agricultural uses of the threshing floor, especially the celebration of a successful harvest with food and drink. The threshing floor could also be associated with fertility rites, as suggested by Hos 9:1.⁵⁵ He questioned why Boaz slept at the threshing floor. The Midrash attributes his doing so to his concern of securing the crop against thieves, while *Ruth Rabbah* 5:15, using Hosea 9:1, ascribes it to his intention of preventing the threshing floor from being used for immoral purposes.⁵⁶ The latter explanation would make for an interesting double-entendre in the story, given the potentially compromising situation of Ruth and Boaz.

LaCocque assumes that there was a tenant for Elimelech's land during his absence, so the tenant had to vacate before this land could be sold.⁵⁷ However, there is no mention of such a figure in the text. Having Elimelech's portion lie fallow or sold to another constitute other possibilities. At any rate, the Holiness Code (Lev 25:10-29) provides for land to revert to its original family owner in the next Jubilee year. Land could also be redeemed by a next of kin, as takes place in the book of Ruth.

Eskenazi and Frymer-Kinsky. In their Jewish Publication Society (hereafter JPS) commentary on the Book of Ruth, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kinsky focus on

⁵⁵LaCocque, *Ruth*, 80.

⁵⁶LaCocque, *Ruth*, 94.

⁵⁷LaCocque, *Ruth*, 112.

land-tenure, particularly on laws to protect land rights and regulating a land's transmission across generations.⁵⁸ They note that widows without living sons occupied a legal gray area. They assert that land in the Book of Ruth did not automatically revert to male relatives, and point to extra-biblical instances where widows, in some cases, inherit land.⁵⁹ They cite contracts from Elephantine in the 5th century B.C.E. in which a woman can inherit, own, or sell property. At Elephantine, women could control their own inheritance by bequeathing it to their sons and daughters.⁶⁰

In their commentary proper, Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky discuss the role of the lack of food in Elimelech's exit from Bethlehem, with the renewed prospect of food there leading to Naomi's return. The reality for Naomi (and Ruth) was the need to glean for their sustenance, in addition to their problem of lack of progeny.⁶¹ As other commentators have done, they also discuss the location of Moab as the place where Elimelech and his family settled. They posit that the "Moab" referred to in the Bible usually means an area to the north of the Arnon River. As for agricultural practices, the authors discuss the process of harvesting, citing the mural painting from the Deir el-Medina tomb in Egypt (13th - 11th centuries B.C.E.) which depicts an Egyptian

⁵⁸Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kinsky, *Ruth* (The JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011) xxvi-xxix.

⁵⁹Eskenazi and Frymer-Kinsky, *Ruth*, xxix.

⁶⁰Eskenazi and Frymer-Kinsky, *Ruth*, xxix reference Ziony Zevit, "Dating Ruth: Legal, Linguistic, and Historical Observations," in *ZAW* 117 (2005) 587.

⁶¹Eskenazi and Frymer-Kinsky, *Ruth*, 3.

couple harvesting crops. Murals from 15th century Egypt likewise show groups of male reapers followed by females who gather the crop.⁶²

Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky hold that Ruth's request to be the first among gleaners required permission from the owner, because it was outside normal conventions for gleaning.⁶³ Granted the permission, Ruth was later given additional privilege of "gleaning among the sheaves." Ruth, after her day's work, practiced a rudimentary form of threshing by beating out the grain to free the kernels from their husks.

Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky also touch on the communal uses of the threshing floor, citing 1 Kgs 22:16 and Jer 15:7, which reference threshing that went on at the town gates. In regard to the land, they posit that Elimelech either sold his land outright or sold it as a usufruct for another farmer's use.⁶⁴ They do not consider the possibility that Elimelech owned a usufruct to begin with, a point I will discuss later. Regardless, Naomi did not have the means to redeem the land, so the task was ultimately left to Boaz.

Koosed. Jennifer Koosed's work on the book of Ruth promises to draw on anthropological and archaeological studies to examine agriculture and eating in Iron Age Judah. However, her efforts in the attempt are shortchanged by her drawing on too many methods,

⁶²Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 30.

⁶³Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 33.

⁶⁴Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 73.

including postcolonial criticism, feminist criticism, and queer theory.⁶⁵ The overambitiousness of its scope detracts from the focus of her work.

Her work contains three “agricultural interludes” which warrant discussion in our effort to “glean” evidence of agricultural background from Ruth. In the first interlude, Koosed links fullness with human fertility. For example, when Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she was in need of both food and progeny. Koosed correctly assumes that neither the agricultural orientation nor the methods of food production have changed significantly in Palestine over the millennia.⁶⁶ Given this assumption, it is puzzling that references to Gustaf Dalman’s *magnum opus* on Palestinian archaeology are absent from her work.

However, Koosed’s commentary is the only one that discusses the method of dry farming.⁶⁷ This is defined by her as an agricultural practice which relies on water from annual rainfalls that is captured in porous soil, as an alternative to irrigation. As she notes, annual rainfall ranges from 40" in the northern hill country of Israel to 16" in the south, with 12" being necessary for a productive crop. As Zenger also notes, a successful crop depends not only on the amount of rainfall, but also on its timing and intensity. Given these variables, Bethlehem had to contend with an extremely narrow margin of error in its crop-raising endeavors. In regard to the anthropological literature cited by her, Koosed sees a focus in this scholarship on animal

⁶⁵Jennifer L. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth* (Studies on the Personalities of the Old Testament; Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2011) x.

⁶⁶Koosed, *Gleaning*, 20.

⁶⁷Koosed, *Gleaning*, 22.

husbandry while fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy products are largely ignored.⁶⁸ For example, she cites W. Robertson Smith's work on the consumption of meat as well as Mary Douglas and Marvin Harris' work regarding food regulations concerning animals. Oded Borowski also receives several citations in Koosed's work, while David Hopkins, whose work on agriculture was published at about the same time, receives no mention.

Her second "agriculture interlude" delves into the process of bread-making, given Bethlehem's moniker the "house of bread." Koosed's statement, "Ruth and Naomi must grow, harvest, and grind" seems a bit curious given the fact that Ruth and Naomi had no part in growing the wheat.⁶⁹ Koosed, as other commentators have done, discusses the process of harvesting the grain. This includes threshing and winnowing. With reference to Borowski, she adds "cleaning" which involves throwing the grain, once again into the wind and sifting it through sieves. Afterwards, the grain is stored in granaries and silos. These are located above and below ground, and are owned publicly and privately. After the winnowing/cleaning process, the grain may undergo additional processes such as grinding, cracking, parching, soaking, boiling, roasting or leavening, depending on the intended end-use. Interestingly, she brings up the fact of barley's growing disuse in the modern diet in Palestine in particular. In modern times, half the barley harvested is fed to animals, one-third is used as malt for alcohol production, while secondarily, barley is used for baked goods. This is in contrast with the time period represented in the book of Ruth in which barley was the food of the poor because of its capacity to thrive in the face of problematic factors such as rainfall uncertainties and alkalinity of the soil.

⁶⁸Koosed, *Gleaning*, 23.

⁶⁹Koosed, *Gleaning*, 66.

Koosed's third "agricultural interlude" discusses "grass" as its overall theme.⁷⁰ Here, Koosed correctly assumes that wheat and barley come from the family of grasses. In this section, Koosed discusses the various types of wheat. This "agricultural interlude" chapter is not as helpful as the previous two, because toward the end of the chapter, it devolves into a "stream of consciousness." For example, the author expounds on our relationship to grass, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and muses about Ruth's "eating" the sunlight and soil stored in the seeds, captured by the blades of (barley) grass.⁷¹

Scholarship on the ANE Agriculture

At this point, my survey will shift to more general works pertaining to ANE agriculture and food. While providing a summary of each work, I will also note any references to the book of Ruth with the purpose of identifying any overlap of Ruth studies and discussion of ANE food production.

Dalman. Gustaf Dalman's (1855-1941) *magnum opus*, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* provides a window onto the pre-modern world of Palestine at the end of the Ottoman empire and shortly thereafter.⁷² Originally it comprised seven volumes, with the first volume being comprised of parts one and two, with volume eight completed after Dalman's death. His work

⁷⁰Koosed, *Gleaning*, 94-102.

⁷¹Koosed, *Gleaning*, 99-102.

⁷²Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (7 vols., Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1928-1942; reprint, New York: Georg Olms, 1987). In 2013, an English translation of the German, of volume one, parts one and two was published. More translated volumes will be published over time. See Gustaf Dalman, *Work and Customs in Palestine*, trans. Nadia Abdulhadi-Sukhtian (Ramallah: Dar Al Nasher, 2013).

was the fruit of his lengthy visits to Palestine as well as Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt over the first quarter of the twentieth century. During these visits he lived as a farmer among farmers and Bedouin.

Dalman's work contains copious references to the Book of Ruth. The distribution of these references as it relates to his work's individual volumes merits discussion. The subject matter of each volume can be correlated to the number of its citations of the Book of Ruth. Volume one, which deals with the seasons (part one covers autumn and winter; part two covers spring and summer), has eight references to the book of Ruth,⁷³ which accounts for twelve percent of Dalman's total references to the book. Several chapters in this volume, which comprises parts one and two, give the reader an idea of the rainfall that occurs throughout the year. Volume two, which deals with activities related to agriculture, contains seven references,⁷⁴ or eleven percent. The most references (thirty or forty-six percent) are contained in volume three,⁷⁵ which deals with the harvest, including threshing, winnowing, sieving, storing, and milling, and paralleling most closely the subject matter of the Book of Ruth. Seven references,⁷⁶ or eleven percent, occur

⁷³Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, vol. 1 contains references to Ruth on pp. 8 (1:22), 416 and 417 (1:22, 2:23), 551 (3:2), 613 (2:14), and 633 (3:3, 7).

⁷⁴Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, vol. 2 contains references to Ruth on pp. 157 (2:14), 172 (2:3; 4:3), and 254 (1:22; 3:2, 15, 17).

⁷⁵Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, vol. 3 contains references to Ruth on pp. 9 (1:22; 2:23), 17 (2:5f.; 2:15), 18 (2:8, 9, 14, 23), 42 (2:2, 16), 43-44 (2:4), 62 (2:2, 2:2f, 2:2ff, 2:8, 23), 71 (3:3), 73 (3:2), 76 (3:2-3), 92 (2:17), 103 (2:15; 3:7), 131 (3:2), 135 (3:7), 136 (3:7), and 151 (2:17; 3:15).

⁷⁶Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, vol. 4 contains references to Ruth on pp. 71-72 (2:14), 262 (3:3), 380 (2:14), 389 (3:7), 397 (3:3, 7), and 403 (2:14).

in volume four, which deals with the preparation of bread, oil, and wine. Three references,⁷⁷ or five percent, are contained in volume five, which discusses textiles, spinning, weaving, and clothing. Two references,⁷⁸ or three percent, are found in volume six, which discusses life in tents as well as cattle / dairy farming, hunting, and fishing. Volume seven, which discusses the house as well as chicken farming, dove farming, and bee keeping, contains no references to the Book of Ruth. Finally, volume eight, which covers domestic life, birth, marriage, and death, contains seven references,⁷⁹ or eleven percent.

Borowski and Hopkins. In the mid 1980's, Oded Borowski and David Hopkins each wrote “seminal” works on agriculture in the ancient Near East that originated with their own respective doctoral dissertations. Borowski’s work is an example of a thorough treatment of agriculture in the ancient Near East with numerous biblical references. He begins with the land, including land use, e. g., terracing, runoff, and land-tenure, here presenting a portrait of what land ownership looked like in the Iron Age. Borowski admits that archaeology is not much help in this regard, even though he cites the Samaria Ostraca as being directly related to land-tenure during the Iron Age. He categorizes land ownership in this period as private, royal, or priestly.

Borowski then proceeds to the process of agriculture, including plowing, sowing, harvesting, and storage. From there, he shifts to various types of crops, including the cereals

⁷⁷Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, vol. 5 contains references to Ruth on pp. 297 (4:7 ff.), 303 (3:3), and 332 (3:15).

⁷⁸Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, vol. 6 contains references to Ruth on p. 125 (2:9, 14; 3:3, 7).

⁷⁹Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, Vol 8 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001) contains references to Ruth in 13 (1:5; 4:13-17), 15 (4:16), 60 (2:14; 3:3, 7), and 90 (2:14).

which have a direct bearing on the Book of Ruth. His concluding section discusses the factors involved in soil fertility and crop yield, factors which make the difference between a successful crop and famine. His references to the Book of Ruth also merit discussion. In several places he provides a window on the world of Ruth. For example, he paints a portrait of the harvest as involving a foreman (Ruth 2:5-6) and the reapers (Ruth 2:23). Behind the reapers are those who are engaged in the harvest, including maidens, and the young men.⁸⁰ Closing out the operation are the gleaners.⁸¹ Borowski also notes that Ruth was granted privileges not accorded to the average gleaner, such as being allowed to drink from the jars provided by the land owner for the workers (Ruth 2:9). Ruth was also allowed to eat bread dipped in vinegar, and she ate from the parched grain, which was probably prepared in the field (Ruth 2:14).

In reference to Ruth's beating out the grain, Borowski discusses the different methods of threshing: with a stick, with work animals, with a threshing sledge, and with a wheel.⁸² Ruth's crude method of threshing with a stick was used for small amounts of grain. This method was also used when security factors prevented city-dwellers from venturing outside the city to the threshing floor.⁸³ In his discussion of the threshing floor, he contrasts the location of the threshing floor in Jer 15:7, that is, close to the city, with the location in Ruth 3:3, where it is

⁸⁰Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 59.

⁸¹Borowski, *Agriculture*, 61.

⁸²Borowski, *Agriculture*, 62-65.

⁸³Borowski, *Agriculture*, 63.

situated somewhat lower than the city of Bethlehem itself. In either case, the threshing floor was commonly used for public functions due to its very large open space.

Almost concurrently with Borowski's work, David Hopkins published his *The Highlands of Canaan*. His study emerged from a realization that no adequate portrait of agricultural life in biblical times existed.⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that Borowski shared his research on Iron Age agriculture with Hopkins as the latter was writing his dissertation.

Early on, Hopkins became cognizant of the limits of what archaeology can contribute to understanding agriculture in the ancient Near East. Epigraphic materials can help bridge the gap between archaeology and the Hebrew Bible. Some information can be gained from the Samaria Ostraca and ostraca from Arad, but only limited inferences can be drawn from these.⁸⁵ Only the Gezer calendar offers any help for reconstructing the agricultural year in Israel. Hopkins adds that despite the Hebrew Bible's limitations on what it can say about ancient agricultural practices in the technical sense, it "remains the most important source of reconstruction of Israelite agricultural systems." However, it "does not provide the framework on how these components fit together systematically."⁸⁶ Fragmented data supplied by archaeology and the Hebrew Bible cannot be meaningfully interpreted without reference to agricultural systems in living societies. This is where Dalman's *magnum opus* can be of help, but Hopkins notes that Dalman's work

⁸⁴David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age* (The Social World of Biblical Antiquity 3; Sheffield: Almond, 1985) 9.

⁸⁵Hopkins, *Highlands*, 17.

⁸⁶Hopkins, *Highlands*, 18. For example, Hopkins regards the agricultural scenes in the book of Ruth as providing the setting for interplay between the characters. Also technical meanings in the book of Ruth in relation to farming practices are regarded as matters of hypothesis.

does not constitute a holistic description of Palestinian agricultural society.⁸⁷ Hopkins uses the analogy of still pictures (in contrast to motion pictures) in evaluating agriculture in the ancient Near East. He rightly states that a collage of stills does not constitute a whole motion picture. Therefore, only a limited picture exists. The systematic description of early Iron Age agriculture found in Hopkins's work serves to shed light "on the process of the emergence of Israel, but it does not eventuate a reconstruction of history of this period."⁸⁸

Though not having as many references to the Book of Ruth as in Borowski's work, Hopkins does make a few such references. For example, Ruth 2:3, 17 is cited in reference to plots within fields which are used to grow barley.⁸⁹ This reference touches upon how wheat and barley crops coexisted in ancient times given that their growing seasons overlapped. Wheat and barley is a typically biblical pairing as appears from Ruth 2:23. Hopkins cites Ruth 3:2 in connection with uses of the threshing floor. Evidence from biblical literature indicates the existence of both private and public threshing floors. He takes the Ruth 3:2 reference as alluding to a communal threshing floor.⁹⁰ His discussion of Ruth 4:3-6 occurs in connection with questions of land-tenure, the recovery of ancestral land, and the prevention of the alienation of their land by family clans.

Routledge. Bruce Routledge's dissertation, *Intermittent Agriculture and the Political Economy of Iron Age Moab*, focuses on the eastern Karak Plateau. The dissertation research

⁸⁷Hopkins, *Highlands*, 19.

⁸⁸Hopkins, *Highlands*, 23.

⁸⁹Hopkins, *Highlands*, 235.

⁹⁰Hopkins, *Highlands*, 226.

question asked by him concerns why human settlement expanded briefly to the eastern Karak Plateau at the end of the Iron Age, later to revert to its former limits.⁹¹ Agriculturally speaking, the most instructive parts of Routledge's work are chapters four, seven, and nine.

Chapter four begins with the physical setting of the eastern Karak Plateau, the marginal area between inhabitable territory and uninhabitable desert. This chapter treats topography, climate, and vegetation, as well as rainfall and environmental change. Given the marginal nature of this locale, there is high probability of low rainfall years, which adversely affect crop yields, in many cases driving them below the ecological margin for survival.⁹² As has been shown in other works reviewed in this chapter, the timing of rains as well as the amount of rainfall can adversely affect crop yield.

Following chapters five and six, which deal with field work and ceramic assemblages, respectively, chapter seven turns to the assorted uses of artifacts in the processing, preparation, and storage of food. For instance, mortars and querns may have been used for the preparation of grain.⁹³ Routledge explains that both glume wheats such as emmer and hulled barley need further processing after threshing, because the threshing process does not remove the grain from the ears – a necessary step before grain can be consumed. The grain is first parched, then pounded in a mortar in order to remove the grain from the ears in the case of wheat, or to remove the fertile

⁹¹Bruce Routledge, *Intermittent Agriculture and the Political Economy of Iron Age Moab*, Ph.D. diss. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996) 6.

⁹²Routledge, *Intermittent Agriculture*, 56.

⁹³Routledge, *Intermittent Agriculture*, 243-44.

florets from the grain in the case of barley. Basalt disks may have been used for the production of flour.⁹⁴ Chapter eight discusses architecture associated with agriculture.

Chapter nine also makes a significant contribution to an understanding of agriculture during the Iron Age. In this chapter, Routledge discusses land and land quality. Optimal land is bottom land, followed by terraces and other land that benefit from runoff. Associated with land in the agricultural equation is the labor necessary to farm the land. Absent from other treatments regarding agriculture is any discussion of the use of manure, which along with sufficient soil moisture can contribute to a significant increase of yield for both wheat and barley.⁹⁵ Biblical references are not cited until Routledge's chapter ten. Even then, no references to the Book of Ruth are included.

Guillaume. Philippe Guillaume's *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible*⁹⁶ seeks to make biblical exegetes more familiar with ancient farming and its techniques. His attempt has added to our knowledge of land tenure and what it may have looked like in the times of the Hebrew Bible.

Admittedly, there is a paucity of information about what land ownership or communal farming was like in biblical times. As Dalman did in the early 20th century, Guillaume draws upon the Ottoman period in Palestine to shed some light upon ancient farming practices. Arable land beyond that which was used for gardening in Ottoman times was considered public land and

⁹⁴Routledge, *Intermittent Agriculture*, 245.

⁹⁵Routledge, *Intermittent Agriculture*, 318-21.

⁹⁶Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible*, (BibleWorld; Sheffield/Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2012).

was divided into plots, that were assigned to each farmer as a usufruct. An usufruct entails the right to cultivate, rent, or mortgage the land and transmit this right of usage to one's legal heirs.⁹⁷ Such tenure was a compromise between communal farming and individualized tenure.

Guillaume views fields in the Book of Ruth as usufruct, where a farmer has right of usage, rather than plots that were owned outright. He argues this by citing Ruth 2:9 which, he contends, would be superfluous had not Boaz owned usufructs to non-contiguous plots separated by those allotted to other farmers. Therefore, Ruth was told to ensure that she was gleaning in plots Boaz controlled. He also cites Ruth 4:3 in arguing that Naomi was selling a usufruct in an open-field system.⁹⁸

Guillaume exhibits an appreciation for the Book of Ruth and the light it sheds on agriculture during the time of the Hebrew Bible. In his treatment, he focuses on practical solutions to the plight of Ruth and Naomi rather than on the theological and legal aspects of the story.⁹⁹ Guillaume regards Boaz as shrewd, if not an outright trickster. As the result of the legal gymnastics Boaz plays on Mr. So and So involving the former's purchase of Ruth (following the *qere* reading), Boaz gains control of Naomi's, Mahlon's, and Chilion's usufructs.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Guillaume, *Land*, 22.

⁹⁸Guillaume, *Land*, 48-49.

⁹⁹Guillaume, *Land*, 83.

¹⁰⁰See Guillaume's discussion, *Land*, 87-90.

Conclusion

This survey has shown that, in contrast with earlier scholarship, modern scholarship of the Book of Ruth is more attentive to background issues including archaeology, geography, and agriculture. For instance, Campbell cites archaeological data from Gezer, Hesi, Lachish, Shechem, and Dothan in his study. Sasson incorporates information on what harvesters ate (with reference to the roasted grain of Ruth 2:14). He also discusses the uses of the threshing floor and the role which the owner of a particular field played in the threshing and winnowing process. Hubbard astutely notes the role of the agricultural cycle as markers of events in the Book of Ruth, namely Naomi and Ruth's return to Bethlehem from Moab at the beginning of the barley harvest. Hubbard, as well as Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, discuss gleaning conventions as they apply to Ruth. Manifestly, Ruth was a young woman unafraid to ask, and was later granted, privileges beyond what the common gleaner enjoyed. Of the commentators surveyed, Koosed attempted the most integrated approach to agriculture and the book of Ruth.

On the topics of land tenure and land redemption, Guillaume incorporates many references to the Book of Ruth, arguing that the various plots cited in the story were usufructs rather than being owned outright. Of the commentators, Bush discusses land-tenure most extensively in his excursus, "The Nature of the Transaction." Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky are open to the possibility that the transaction involving Elimelech's plot was either an outright sale or merely the sale of its usufruct.

Much appreciation is due to previous scholarship as a foundation for what I shall attempt to do in this study. In the next chapter, I shall provide an exegesis of Ruth 1:1-6, after which the issues of drought, famine, and food-related migration (and return) will be discussed. Chapter

Three will provide an exegesis of Ruth 2:4-17, 23, pertaining to the harvest, as well as Ruth 3:6-13, dealing with the process of threshing and winnowing. Evidence will be cited here concerning agricultural practices of Judah and Moab as they pertain to the Book of Ruth. Chapter Four, a synthesis of chapters two and three, will examine the effects of migration, farming, and ecology on the underprivileged (including widows and foreigners). In this chapter, I will also draw conclusions and make suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter will deal with food-related migration as found in Ruth 1:1-6. Food was the primary driving force in both Elimelech's migration from Bethlehem to Moab and also Naomi and Ruth's migration back to Bethlehem. This chapter will begin with an exegesis of Ruth 1:1-6. Next, I will discuss the instances of famine in the Hebrew Bible, contrasting these passages with what is told in the Book of Ruth. Third, I will investigate instances of food-related migration elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and determine what bearing, if any, this has on the understanding of the migration found in the book of Ruth. Finally, a determination will be made if there is material evidence for migratory activity.

An Exegesis of Ruth 1:1-6

1. Now it happened in the days when the judges ruled, that a famine was in the land, and they went from Bethlehem of Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab: a man, his wife, and his two sons.¹
2. The man's name was Elimelech; his wife's name was Naomi; and his two sons' names² were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. They entered the fields of Moab, and they lived there.

¹The Greek (with the exception of some Greek manuscripts) and Syriac lacks "two."

²The MT has the singular (אֶחָד) in reference to the sons where the plural would be expected. See Paul Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005) 504.

3. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she and her two sons remained.
4. The sons married Moabite women – the name of the first was Orpah, and the name of the second was Ruth. They lived there ten years.
5. Then the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.
6. Now she and her daughters-in-law got up and returned from the fields of Moab because from there she heard that Yahweh visited his people and gave them food.

The Book of Ruth begins with two markers, time and circumstance, which provide the setting for the story. First, the story takes place in the time when the land was ruled by the judges (בימי שפט השפטים), and the land was ravaged by famine. Similar time markers are found at the beginning of the books of Joshua (אחרי מות משה), Judges (אחרי מות יחושע), 2 Samuel (בימי אחשורוש), Esther (בשלשים שנה ברביעי בחמשה לחדש), Ezekiel (אחרי מות שאול), and Nehemiah (בחדש כסלו שנת עשרים). These books are similarly introduced with a *waw-conversive* + a form of the verb *היה*, usually *ויהי*.³ The two markers in Ruth 1:1, i.e., in the days when the judges judged and there was a famine in the land, brings us to the verse's main clause dealing with the man, wife, and the two sons going to sojourn in Moab.

“A man from Bethlehem of Judah went to sojourn in the fields of Moab – he and his wife and his two sons.” “Sojourn” (גר) is used of those who leave their homeland because of

³See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 553-54. See also Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribner, 1971) 123, which is quoted by Waltke and O'Connor reference.

political, economic, or other circumstances to look for relief in another country.⁴ These sojourners would not enjoy rights of full citizens. Sojourners would not possess land, usually relying on the generosity of strangers (in the perspective of the גר), being economically weaker in a land not their own.⁵ Conversely in ancient Israel, a גר would have the right to glean (Lev 19:10; 23:22; and Deut 24:19-21) and the right not to be oppressed (Exod 22:20-23 and 23:9). However, it cannot be known how consistently these rights of the גר were put into practice.

Bethlehem was known as a producer of grain, as its name “house of bread” suggests. Bethlehem, at an altitude of an average of 800 meters, is located on the saddle between two mountains in the range that runs from Jerusalem to Hebron, where it reaches an altitude of 1,000 meters. To the west, the elevation descends to 600 meters where it meets the Shephelah, and to the east, the elevation descends to 100 to 200 meters where it meets the Judean desert.⁶ The soil profile of the area includes *terra rossa* soil to the west of Bethlehem, and rendzina soils to the

⁴Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) 308. Besides the sojourn that happens in the Book of Ruth with Elimelech and his family, Gen 12:10 and 47:4 tell of a going to Egypt to ride out the famine. It should be noted that in the last two examples, Abram and Jacob, respectively, are semi-nomads.

⁵The Holiness Code in Lev 19:33-34 prescribes that foreigners not be oppressed, but instead be treated as natives. Their legal and economic plight (along with that of the widow and orphan) are addressed in the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 24:17-22) which urges that justice not be perverted and that part of the crop be left for the alien.

⁶Fernand de Cree, “History and Archaeology of the Bet Shahur Region,” *ZDPV* 115 (1999) 61.

east.⁷ To the north, the soil consists of *terra rossa* with rocky outcrops, and alluvial soils toward the rivers to the southeast.⁸

In the story of Ruth, Moab was the alternative chosen by Elimelech when famine struck Bethlehem. According to J. Maxwell Miller, the Moabite plateau, situated between the wadis Mujib and Hesa, was well-watered by winter rains, and the soil was porous enough to hold the moisture for cereal crops as well as providing pasturage for sheep and goats.⁹ Additionally, extending through the plains of Moab is what Lücke, Zaidat, and Taimeh consider Inceptisol soil, defined as “moderately developed soils, in Jordan mostly red, with clay-rich B horizon, often rich in primary and secondary calcium carbonate.”¹⁰ Moab may have extended north of the Wadi Mujib¹¹ into a region which might have been more accessible for Elimelech and his family, since

⁷Soil taxonomies have evolved over the decades. For example, *terra rossa* is an older term, last used in Bender’s taxonomy in 1974 (first used by Reifenberg in 1947). See Bernhard Lücke, Feras Ziadat, and Awni Taimeh, “The Soils of Jordan,” in *Atlas of Jordan: History,* . Correlation of “*Terra Rossa*” precisely within different taxonomies (e.g., Ruellan, Aubert, and Verheyne) has by no means become clear. See Arie Singer, *The Soils of Israel* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2007) 260.

⁸De Cree, “History and Archaeology,” 62-63.

⁹J. Maxwell Miller, “Moab,” *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:883.

¹⁰Lücke, Ziadat, and Taimeh, “The Soils of Jordan,” 75. If the soils are similar between Bethlehem on the west and Moab on the east, it would be unlikely that soil quality would have been a factor in why one area would have experienced famine while another area would not.

¹¹Control of the area north of the Wadi Mujib seems to have been somewhat fluid. This is reflected by the land’s initial allotment to the tribe of Reuben (Josh 13:9 and 16-21), later to come under the control of the Gadites (Josh 21:38-39 and 1 Chr 6:81). In Judg 3:13-14, Moabite influence extends west across the Jordan Valley under King Eglon (Judg 3:13-14). See the discussion in Timothy P. Harrison, “‘The Land of Medeba’ and Early Iron Age Madaba,” in *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighboring Areas in Honour of Michele Daviau* (ANE Studies Supplement 29; Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2009) 31.

they would not have needed to traverse the Wadi Mujib with its deep gorge to the north of the plateau or the Dead Sea escarpment to the west of the plateau.¹²

The story's characters are introduced in verse two. The man's name is Elimelech, the wife's name is Naomi, and the sons' names are Mahlon and Chilion. Interestingly, when the sons are introduced, the singular form of שם appears where the plural form would be expected.¹³

Elimelech's name carries the straightforward meaning of "My God is King." Naomi's name, "pleasant," will later become a subject of word-play involving her bitter (מָרָא) state of mind upon the deaths of her husband and two sons, as Naomi reveals later in Ruth 1:20 when she instructs her fellow Bethlehemites to call her "Mara." The names of Mahlon and Chilion may foreshadow their later demise.¹⁴ Jack Sasson suggests the rhyming of these names may serve as a mnemonic device.¹⁵ "Mahlon" (מַחֲלוֹן) comes from the root חלה, "to be sick."¹⁶

Mahlon's name can thus be rendered as "sickly." "Chilion" (כִּלְיוֹן) comes from the root בלה, "to

¹²Miller, "Moab," 4:883.

¹³See Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 504 §136 l.

¹⁴Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 42 uses the expression "*Nomen est omen*" in noting how personal names can foreshadow one's future, especially in the case of Mahlon and Chilion.

¹⁵Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (The Johns Hopkins University Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 18.

¹⁶See Ludwig Kohler and Walter Baumgartner, *HALOT* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2001) 569.

fail, to be consumed (kidneys), to languish, to pine.”¹⁷ Additionally “Chilion” can signify frailty.¹⁸ As their names suggest, the two sons’ prospects for a long life are rather bleak. As most parents would not knowingly give their children names that convey such pessimism, the author of the Book of Ruth may have given the sons names on an *ad hoc* basis to suggest that they would not live long.¹⁹

Naomi becomes the focus beginning with verse three when Elimelech dies. This focus is bolstered with its reference as “Naomi’s husband.”²⁰ No indication is given as to his cause of death within the Book of Ruth itself, even though there has been much speculation, as noted in the previous chapter. At the end of the verse, the writer lists Naomi and the two sons as the survivors.²¹ They are now in a vulnerable position with Naomi in her legal status of “widow” and Mahlon and Chilion as “fatherless.” At the time of Elimelech’s death, the sons’ ages are not mentioned, so it is not known how long after their father’s death that they would have married.

In verse four, after Elimelech’s death, perhaps in an effort to put down roots in Moab,²² Mahlon and Chilion marry Moabite women – introduced as Orpah and Ruth. Interestingly, the verb used for “marry” is נשא rather than לקח, which could suggest that the text of the Book of

¹⁷HALOT 477.

¹⁸HALOT 479.

¹⁹As Melanie Kohlmoos suggests in *Ruth: Das Alte Testament Deutsch* (Altes Testament Deutsch Neubearbeitungen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009) 5.

²⁰See Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 240.

²¹Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 541 §146c.

²²Nielsen, *Ruth*, 44 suggests that on the one hand, the family has a chance at survival, but on the other, they may be lost to Israel forever.

Ruth is post-exilic.²³ After the sons are married, they live in Moab approximately ten years.²⁴ Normally, by that time the new couples would have produced offspring. The women's wombs would be "opened," as was the case of Abraham's wife Sarah.²⁵ Even though the author of the Book of Ruth does not give any explicit reason why Mahlon and Chilion did not produce offspring as Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky observe,²⁶ Kohlmoos rightly suggests that Elimelech's sons may not have been potent, due to their weakly constitution as suggested by their names.²⁷

Next in the chain of events for Naomi is the death of her sons, Mahlon and Chilion. In contrast with the lack of any explanation for Elimelech's death, the sons' names suggest that their poor health may have at least contributed to their deaths. Now that Naomi is the sole survivor of the family members who emigrated from Bethlehem, she is described by the biblical writer as being without her husband and sons. Not only is Naomi without a husband to provide for her, she is now without sons to care for her in her old age, leaving her in dire straits, especially given her status as a foreigner in Moab in addition to being a widow. Mahlon and Chilion, now deceased, are referred to as ילדים rather than בנים. The former term is used

²³Jenni and Westerman, 650 and HALOT 724-27 observe that נשא is used of marrying in later texts. See also Ezra 9:2, 12; 10:44; Neh 13:25; 2 Chr 11:12; 13:21; and 24:3.

²⁴The כ prefix conveys approximation; see Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 491 §133g.

²⁵Genesis 16:3 recounts Sarah's giving Hagar to Abraham to produce a child after ten years of barrenness. Sarah herself would later produce Isaac with Abraham.

²⁶Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 7.

²⁷Kohlmoos, *Ruth*, 7.

primarily of younger boys, not of adult married men.²⁸ However, its use here forms an inclusio with Ruth 4:16.²⁹ In 1:5, Naomi lost her ילדים while in 4:16, she takes a ילד, who was born to Ruth and Boaz, to her breast.

Given the fact that no blood-relatives remain for Naomi in Moab, she and her daughters-in-law “got up and returned” upon getting word that the famine had ended in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6). The use of the 3fs pronoun היא for Naomi suggests she is represented as the chief actor, while the daughters-in-law³⁰ are merely secondary figures.³¹ With respect to the ending of the famine, יהוה is represented as the primary actor because he “visited his people and gave them food.” פקד, in this case, represents divine assistance to meet his people’s distress.³² So Bethlehem, after it had lost its status as the “house of food,” has regained it. This sets the stage for Naomi’s return.

Famine in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Ruth

Famine is a common occurrence in the Hebrew Bible, beginning in the time of Abraham (Gen 12:10-20). In this particular instance, Abram and Sarai sojourn in Egypt. Because Sarai

²⁸Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 8 takes the change in terms as designed to call attention to Naomi’s role as mother.

²⁹See Campbell, *Ruth*, 56.

³⁰The Greek, Vulgate, and Syriac add the word “two.”

³¹Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 294 §16.3.2c.

³²See Jenni and Westermann, *TLOT*, 1024. Some examples include Gen 50:24; Exod 3:16; 4:31; and 13:19.

was represented as Abram's sister rather than his wife, he accumulated additional livestock and slaves. When the ruse was discovered by Pharaoh, Abram, along with his wife, livestock, and slaves were expelled from Egypt. The wife/sister ruse was also perpetrated upon Abimelech by Abraham (Gen 20:1-18) with no reason for his doing so being mentioned. In this instance, Abraham again accumulated livestock and slaves, and he is allowed to settle wherever he pleased, even after the ruse was discovered. Isaac and Rebekah perpetrate the same ruse on Abimelech (Gen 26:6-11) again because of a famine (Gen 26:1). They were eventually sent away because Isaac's holdings from his accumulation of livestock, crops, and a large household became too large (Gen 26:16).

In the southern Levant, especially in Bethlehem, where the Book of Ruth is set, rainfall ranges from approximately 300–800 mm per year.³³ Additionally, rainfall quantities and seasonal distribution vary from year to year. Rainfall uncertainty aggravates the normally thin margin of error for crop success in the southern Levant.

Drought comes about from a lack of timely rainfall³⁴ within a given growing season which may cause crop failure. An extended drought may cause famine, a scarcity of food. Both can extend for years, even decades. This seems to be the case in the Book of Ruth, as more than ten years elapsed between the time when Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem for Moab and when Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth upon hearing that the famine there had ended.

³³See Arlene Miller Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change in Early Bronze Age Canaan," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 14 (1999) 33.

³⁴The amount of rainfall during the growing season is only one factor contributing to a successful crop. A crop also needs rainfall at crucial points in the crop cycle.

Food shortages, or famines, range from mild to severe. On the lowest end of the scale, a first-degree shortage can be managed by rationing, without which segments of the population would suffer from serious malnutrition and starvation. In a second-degree shortage, there is not enough food to go around for long-term survival. In this case, rationing would be sufficient to keep most of the population alive until the next harvest, yet the population may suffer from deficiency diseases. A third-degree shortage, the most severe, is characterized by insufficient food for long-term survival, even if everyone is given a bare minimum ration for survival. The food supply would run out before harvest, and mass-starvation would result without imports.³⁵

Causes

Even though no causes for the famine are mentioned at the beginning of the Book of Ruth, it is worthwhile to investigate possible causes. Given the fact that the setting of the Book of Ruth is set in a semi-arid area, the lack of rainfall is the most likely possibility. Climate and environmental fluctuations can very easily trigger a drought, which may give rise to famine. According to Riehl, most Early Bronze (EB) and Middle Bronze (MB) sites in Syria have from 200–400 mm of mean annual precipitation in modern times. Water deficits can also lead to an increase of salinity of the soil, making this less hospitable for crops. In the longer term, water

³⁵See Peter Bowbrick, “The Causes of Famine: A Refutation of Professor Sen’s Theory,” *Food Policy* 11 (1986) 105. Sen’s theory posits that the cause of famine is not the sudden decline in food availability, but it is a sudden redistribution of available food.

deficits cause the streams to narrow, leading to incision of the land, which leaves the former bottom lands “high and dry.”³⁶

Aside from the lack of rainfall, environmental and climatic change also cause droughts. I will explore this cause further in my discussion of the evidence for droughts and famine. Riehl sounds a note of caution, pointing out that the causes of droughts are often multi-faceted. A variety of factors need to be considered such as ecogeography as well as the political and cultural composition of the population. As she notes, levels of variability within the environment and society give rise to a very complex network of interrelationships.³⁷

Evidence

Famine occurred from time to time in the ancient Near East. This is partly borne out by official correspondence from the area: both request for aid and records of aid given. For example, the Armana Tablets tell of a Hittite queen writing to Ramesses II that she had no grain in her lands.³⁸ In the late 13th Century, Merneptah reports in the Great Karnak Inscription that he sent grain by ship to the Land of Hatti to keep its inhabitants alive.³⁹ In Ugarit letters of the late 13th to

³⁶Simone Riehl, “Climate and Agriculture in the Ancient Near East: a Synthesis of the Archaeobotanical and Stable Carbon Isotope Evidence,” *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 17 (2008) S43.

³⁷Simone Riehl, “Variability in Ancient Near Eastern Environmental and Agricultural Development,” *Journal of Arid Environments* 86 (2012) 119.

³⁸KOB 21.38; Itamar Singer, “A Political History of Ugarit,” In *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (ed. Wilfred G. E. Watson and Nicolas Wyatt; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 715.

³⁹G. A. Wainright, “Menepthah’s Aid to the Hittites,” *JEA* 46 (1960) 24-28.

early 12th Centuries BCE, the king of Hatti writes (RS20.212) about a vital grain shipment which he describes as “a matter of death and life.”⁴⁰

A study by Langgut, Finkelstein, and Litt cites pollen studies which suggest a very dry period which occurred ca. 1250 to 1100 BCE, at the end of the Late Bronze age.⁴¹ A core was drilled from the Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret) which was subjected to high-resolution pollen analysis for the Bronze and Iron Ages. This phase was identified on the basis of a significant decrease in Mediterranean-region tree pollen values, this pointing to a reduction in precipitation as well as a shrinking of the Mediterranean forest.⁴² The LB dry event was followed by a recovery of Mediterranean trees and cultivated olive trees during the Iron I period.⁴³ It should be noted that the area around the Sea of Galilee typically enjoys a Mediterranean climate, while as one moves south, the climate transitions to a semi-arid climate in the southern Levant.

Pollen records are also cited by Langgut, Finkelstein, and Litt from the western margin of the Dead Sea, closer to where the events of the Book of Ruth are set, which suggests a lack of conformity in the sediment deposition of the western margin of the Dead Sea at the end of the LB. At this general time period, these sediments were embedded in a terrestrial environment rather than in a lake environment, as was the case for previous and subsequent periods.⁴⁴ As

⁴⁰Singer, “A Political History of Ugarit,” 716.

⁴¹Dafna Langgut, Israel Finkelstein, and Thomas Litt, “Climate and the Late Bronze Collapse: New Evidence from the Southern Levant,” *Tel Aviv* 40 (2013) 149.

⁴²*Ibid.* 150.

⁴³*Ibid.* 151.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* 160.

Langgut, Finkelstein, and Litt note, the occurrence of a shore depositional environment probably represents a reduction in precipitation in the sources of the Dead Sea basin which would have resulted in a drop of Dead Sea levels. Likewise, three other high-resolution southern Levant pollen records point to a dry event at the end of LB and its transition to the Iron Age.⁴⁵

Isotopic data have been used to discern times of moist environment versus times of dry environment throughout history. The specific focus here is on stable isotopes of oxygen (O^{18} and O^{16}) and carbon (C^{13} and C^{12}). The former is expressed in terms of $\delta^{18}O$, the measure of the ratio of stable isotopes $O^{18} : O^{16}$ expressed in “per mil” or parts per thousand (‰). The latter is expressed in terms of $\delta^{13}C$, the ratio of stable isotopes $C^{13} : C^{12}$. Salient for our discussion of drought are the two types of environment. Dry environments are known as C_4 , these getting less than 230 mm of annual rainfall. Moist environments, C_3 , get more than 300 mm of annual rainfall.⁴⁶

Rosen discusses measurement of $\delta^{18}O$ from land snail shells found in the Negev, as reflecting the amount of rainwater of a given period. For example, shells dated ca. 6800-4300 BCE yielded low values of $\delta^{18}O$ which indicates atmospheric circulation patterns that resulted in higher frequency of storms. The $\delta^{18}O$ values began to increase ca. 1800 BCE, equivalent to the values of $\delta^{18}O$ in modern snail shells of the area, which is indicative of a drier climate.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ibid. 164.

⁴⁶Rosen, “The Social Response to Environmental Change,” 29.

⁴⁷Rosen, “The Social Response to Environmental Change,” 30.

In regards to the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements in Riehl's study,⁴⁸ 160 such values were taken from 9 crop taxa (sing. "taxon") from seven Near Eastern archaeological sites in an investigation of the question of moisture conditions during the transition between the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Riehl suggests that in the sites that she studied, barley was the main cereal crop throughout the Early and Middle Bronze ages, a common phenomenon in arid and semi-arid climates. Free-threshing wheat, which was more prominent during the Bronze Age, still did not supplant barley as the main cereal crop. Among the hulled wheats, emmer wheat was regularly used, while einkorn was not because of its low yield structure and relatively high water requirements.⁴⁹ Riehl also suggests that moisture increased during the final phase of Early Bronze, when crops shifted from barley to free-threshing wheat for about a century, followed by a shift back to barley as moisture levels decreased (and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ levels increased). Even those areas that received 150 mm of precipitation annually and utilized irrigation had a high proportion of 2-row barley, with free-threshing wheat at those sites with moderate or higher precipitation.⁵⁰

Geomorphology, the science of landforms and their evolution, yields evidence concerning agricultural systems in the ANE. Rosen suggests that geomorphological evidence, as well as phytolith evidence, attest to Early Bronze reliance on a previous agricultural system which failed

⁴⁸Riehl, "Variability in Ancient Near Eastern Environmental and Agricultural Development," 114. See also S. Riehl, R. A. Bryson, and K. Pustovoytov, "Changing Growing Conditions for Crops during the Near Eastern Bronze Age (3000-1200 BC): the Stable Carbon Isotope Evidence," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35 (2008) 1011-22.

⁴⁹Riehl, "Variability in Ancient Near Eastern Environmental and Agricultural Development," 115.

⁵⁰Ibid.

due to a change in the hydrological regime.⁵¹ Phytoliths are defined as bodies of amorphous silica which form in the epidermal cells of plants. These are produced in cereals as well as in other grasses, sedges, rushes, and palms. Silica uptake increases when crops are irrigated or otherwise grown in moist alluvial soils.⁵² She also suggests the existence of widespread alluvial activity and aggrading floodplains in the Chalcolithic and EB which resulted in the extensive terrace system that ceased sometime in the late EB period. Wadi incision began which lasted until Byzantine times.⁵³ Consequently, what began as a floodplain and its associated floodwater irrigation became a land of deeply incised wadis, with the bottom land becoming high and dry. Crops grown on this land no longer had the advantage of floodwater irrigation; therefore farmers had to resort to dry farming. In support, Rosen cites the example of modern Nahal Lahish. Here, stream banks overflowed during the EB, as contrasted with the deeply incised regime of present-day Nahal Lahish. During the EB, overbank and levee deposits were finely laminated as contrasted with the very poorly-sorted wadi deposits from later Byzantine-era fill.⁵⁴

Other Evidence

Settlement patterns also served as indicators of periods of famine as well as periods of prosperity. I will discuss this in detail when I deal with the issue of migration as a coping strategy

⁵¹Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change," 27. Her study involves the Negev, Shephela (Southern Foothills), and the Coastal Plain.

⁵²Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change," 34-35.

⁵³Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change," 31.

⁵⁴Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change," 32.

for famine. Paleoluminological evidence from the Dead Sea may attest to stages of rainfall or the lack thereof. The lack of rainfall is marked by evaporation of the Dead Sea and the concomitant increase of salt concentration.⁵⁵ In modern times, the low level of the Dead Sea is caused not only by the lack of rainfall, but also by increased irrigation from its tributaries.

Effects

In arid and semi-arid conditions, the margin of error for crop success is very thin. A decrease of 100 mm of annual rainfall can be devastating in Hebron (which receives closer to the minimum rainfall) in the south, while northern communities in Hazor or Megiddo, because they get more rainfall, may be better able to withstand the decrease in the farmer's endeavor to produce a successful crop.⁵⁶

Obvious effects of famine are the draw-down of reserves and a food deficit when reserves have been depleted. Grain prices also increase as supplies diminish. For instance, during Egypt's mid-20th dynasty, grain prices increased dramatically in the days of Ramesses VII in the second half of the 12th Century BCE due to famine.⁵⁷

Mitigation Strategies

Several mitigation strategies can be employed against famine. For instance, farmers can grow crops that require less water and are more resistant to salinity in the soil. Barley (*hordeum*

⁵⁵Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change," 30.

⁵⁶Langgut, Finkelstein, and Litt, "Climate and the Late Bronze Collapse," 164.

⁵⁷Ibid.

vulgare) has been the main grain crop in semi-arid and arid climates. Barley has a higher tolerance for unfavorable growing conditions such as drought stress and soil salinity compared to wheat.⁵⁸ Even though wheat, the preferable grain for human consumption, does not withstand drought as well as barley, some types of wheat withstand drought better than others. For example, emmer (*tritium dicoccum*) wheat withstands famine better than einkorn (*tritium monococcum*) because of emmer's drought resistance due to its superior water-holding capacity and salt tolerance.⁵⁹

In times of famine, diet in semi-arid climates would necessarily shift to foods that are more drought-resistant. Thus, people in areas who formerly grew einkorn wheat would shift towards growing emmer wheat. For those in areas who grew emmer wheat, when conditions become inhospitable, the shift toward growing barley became a necessity. For example, according to Riehl, lower Mesopotamia changed over from wheat to barley between 2400 and 1700 BCE due to the increase in salinity.⁶⁰

Guillaume has written extensively on agricultural credit and how it worked when a farmer's household experienced a food deficit after reserves were depleted.⁶¹ A family needs twelve months worth of grain in order to survive from harvest to harvest each year. The farmer also needs a certain amount of seed grain to plant the next year's crop. For purposes of

⁵⁸Riehl, "Variability in Ancient Near Eastern Environmental and Agricultural Development," 115.

⁵⁹Riehl, "Climate and Agriculture in the Ancient Near East," S46.

⁶⁰Riehl, "Climate and Agriculture in the Ancient Near East," S49.

⁶¹Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield/Oakville: Equinox, 2012).

Guillaume's study, the farmer would need one month's worth of grain for sowing. Therefore, a particular crop would need to produce thirteen months worth of grain for the farmer to break even (1:13). More than thirteen months' supply would be considered a surplus to be stored for years of possible crop failure. Less yield would result in a deficit. Depending on the severity of the shortfall, a farmer may be able to withstand a limited number of crop failures, while several consecutive crop failures would become highly problematic for the farmer.

A primary strategy against successive years of crop failure is storage of the surplus during years of successful yields. Besides communal and governmental storage facilities like those written about in the Joseph story (Gen 41: 33-36, 46-49), individual farmers also had basic storage facilities involving little to no cost. Individual facilities have the added benefit of hiding grain from marauding troops and others intent on stealing grain. Stored surpluses also benefit the farmer and his family because the stored food can be consumed on the spot.⁶²

Optimally, the farmer would prefer a carry-over to feed his dependents, pay his taxes, reimburse his creditors, have seed grain for the following year, and have some extra for contingencies.⁶³ However, it is unrealistic to expect a carry-over every year, given factors which are outside the farmer's control. Hence, a farmer needs a strategy to deal with eventual crop failure. Besides using his previous surplus to tide the family over until the next harvest, options include consuming new grain before the harvest by parching (a technique of dry-roasting) in the event that food supplies run out.⁶⁴ This strategy could shave a month from the normal time from

⁶²Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis* 126.

⁶³Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis* 125.

⁶⁴Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*, 125-26. See also Josh 5:11.

planting to harvest of six months. However this would reduce the amount of harvest and would not be sustainable in the long run.

Provided credit is available to the farmer, he can borrow grain from the local merchant to tide his family over in times of crisis. The grain (principal + interest) would need to be repaid after the following harvest, if the yield permits. In the event of another shortfall, the farmer would need to borrow further, capitalizing the accrued interest plus increasing the principal. A farmer may need a bumper crop in succeeding harvests in order to service the debt by means of a balloon payment.⁶⁵

The farmer may conclude that it is wiser to borrow from a merchant than to wait until his surplus is depleted. This may turn out to be prudent if grain prices were to rise steeply as a result of shortages from multiple crop failures. However, at some point, the farmer's indebtedness would reach a level where he would never be able to repay his creditor, even if the farmer enjoyed a number of very high yields. The farmer would experience insolvency, loss of creditworthiness, bankruptcy, and forfeiture of assets.⁶⁶

In the event of insolvency, the lender may continue to assist his client if he has the means to survive by offering the farmer clemency (waiving interest or not insisting on repayment of the principal) or by charity in providing food for the farmer and his family. Alternatively, the lender may take possession of the land and require the indebted farmer to continue working the land in exchange for its upkeep until the arrears are settled or until the debts are canceled. In event of a

⁶⁵Gullaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*, 127.

⁶⁶Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*, 129.

long series of crop failures, both the farmer and the creditor may be threatened.⁶⁷ If the creditor had no more grain to replenish his coffers, his ability to provide further lending would be restricted. At this point, imports may be the only way out of his, and by extension, the farmer's predicament.

Migration in the Ancient World

In connection with migration, two main subsistence strategies were in play in the ancient world. Nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples employed diffuse subsistence strategies which entailed moving frequently, albeit not very far from their local area. Any migration that took place would be only for a short distance. Groups that employed this strategy include modern hunter-gatherers, some subsistence-oriented pastoral herders, some unspecialized farmer-stockbreeders, and some prehistoric incipient gardeners.⁶⁸ Patriarchal characters such as Abraham and Jacob (see Gen 12:7; 26:3-4; and 28:13) are biblical examples of those who employed a diffuse subsistence strategy.

Focal subsistence strategies depend on a narrow range of highly-productive but relatively inelastic and localized resources. Represented in this resource group are industry-specialized laborers, herd-following hunters, most farmers, and pastoralists linked to specialized markets. The threshold at which long-distance migration occurred may have been reached much more

⁶⁷Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*, 133.

⁶⁸David W. Anthony, "Migration in Archaeology: The Baby and the Bathwater," *American Archaeologist* 92 (1990) 901.

rapidly among societies with focal economies.⁶⁹ Elimelech and his family are examples of those who would have employed a focal subsistence strategy. The author of the Book of Ruth does not indicate if anyone else migrated with Elimelech, but this possibility cannot be ruled out. Since the primary consideration here is the events which happened in the Book of Ruth, the remainder of this section will consider long-distance migration.

Conditions Leading to Migration

A combination of stresses leads to long-distance migration. Negative (push) stresses in one's home area combined with positive (pull) stresses in the destination area are prime motivators of migration. Additionally, one is more likely to migrate if transportation costs between the two regions are favorable. Culture-specific value and belief systems are also a consideration in a decision whether to migrate, as well as a flow of information between the destination area and home area.⁷⁰

Push stresses include extended drought and famine such as is the case with Elimelech in the Book of Ruth. Related to this would be the lack of upward economic mobility, especially when neighboring areas present a better opportunity. Other homeland stresses include military invasion and oppression, either by a governmental entity or by an oppressive majority over the oppressed minority of inhabitants.⁷¹

⁶⁹Anthony, "Migration in Archaeology," 901.

⁷⁰Anthony, "Migration in Archaeology," 899.

⁷¹Anthony, "Migration in Archaeology," 900.

Pull stresses, which work hand-in-hand with the flow of information from a prospective destination area, include better economic opportunity, more productive farmlands for food production, and pasture lands. Also friends or family members living in destination areas can facilitate the flow of information, therefore increasing the chances of migration – provided the information is favorable.⁷² Conversely, the likelihood of migration is very low to areas from which there is no flow of information.⁷³ Even though Moabites are viewed negatively in the biblical record, there was still interaction between Israel and Moab in Iron I, as the Deuteronomistic History (DH) tradition records.⁷⁴ Moreover, Moabites are viewed neutrally in the Book of Ruth. The only negative factor is the fact that Ruth identified herself as a foreigner. Mitigating this was the positive manner in which she treated Naomi.

Types of Migration

Anthony discusses five types of long-distance migrations. The first type, leapfrogging, entails advance scouts being sent to ascertain social conditions and resource potentials of the prospective destination region. Scouts would also determine the likelihood of the prospective land being habitable by their migrant group.⁷⁵ The story of the twelve spies (Num 13:1-33) would

⁷²Anthony, “Migration in Archaeology,” 900.

⁷³Anthony, “Migration in Archaeology,” 901.

⁷⁴See J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 182. On one hand, David, while on the run from Saul, sent his parents to Moab for protection (1 Sam 22:3); on the other hand, he defeated the Moabites (2 Sam 8:2) and dealt brutally with them.

⁷⁵Anthony, “Migration in Archaeology,” 902.

serve as a biblical example of leapfrogging migration, had their optimistic assessment of the situation been adopted by the people. This method of migration was implemented as the migrants neared their destination land.

The second type, migration streams, involves the use of earlier migrants to create pathways by overcoming obstacles and providing routing for later migrants. The focal point of this type of migration would be quite small, as these migrants would be kin-defined. Consequently, access to information would be quite limited. Evidence of such migration may lie in donor-region material culture such as the Orangeware that was found during the Late Mayan collapse in the 9th Century CE.⁷⁶

Return migration, the third type of migration, in which a counter-stream of migrants moves back to their place of origin, has a direct bearing on the events in chapter one of the Book of Ruth. As indicated in Ruth 1:6, the reasons for the original migration had abated, and Bethlehem once again was producing an ample amount of food to support its inhabitants. For return migration to happen, not only must the “push” stresses of the migrants’ origin be eliminated, the cost of travel must not be so great as to preclude a return. Additionally, return migration may also produce trade between the origin and destination areas.

The fourth type of migration, migration frequency, represents migration by those who migrated previously. A modern example is older United States citizens who migrate north or south, depending on the seasons of the year. This type of migration is governed by the principle of inertia: those who stay in one place for a long period of time are less likely to move, while

⁷⁶Anthony, “Migration in Archaeology,” 904.

those who move frequently are more likely to move again. Frequent migration is a process rather than a single event and produces its own dynamics as events unfold.⁷⁷

The last type is migration demography, which asserts that the age-sex structure of the population can provide evidence relating to migration. In expanding farming communities, especially in patriarchal societies, scouts tend to be male. As the migration stream matures, the demographics of the migrants moves toward gender parity as the scouts are sent first, followed by the rest of the population.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The Book of Ruth begins in the setting of a famine and one family's endeavor to deal with it. We are not told the duration of the famine, only that one family decided that it was better to migrate to Moab than to stay in Bethlehem and ride out the adversity. The author does not tell the reader anything about the characters' reasoning or motives, though this has not stopped scholars from speculating.

What we can conclude is that the events in the story were not the result of one or two crop failures, but rather of a famine that had been happening for some time – not an uncommon occurrence. What we do know is that the famine lasted more than a decade after Elimelech's family's migration to Moab. More than likely, a family would consume its surplus, switch its agriculture to growing barley, a more drought-resistant crop, and employ everything within the family's means to stretch out their yield. They could try to buy grain in the marketplace as long

⁷⁷Anthony, "Migration in Archaeology," 905.

⁷⁸Anthony, "Migration in Archaeology," 905.

as their money held out, since foreign aid was given to other nations in the event of famine. If the economy was sophisticated enough, a family could use credit against future yields. This strategy could only go so far, however. At some point, migration to a place that was known to have food would prove to be the best option. However, not everyone would take this option.

More than likely a family would migrate to a land about which they had information on the availability of food, as would be the case with nearby Moab. Information could either come from those who migrated previously, from Moabites, or from traders who were bringing their wares.

Once in Moab, Elimelech dies. More than a decade later, Mahlon and Chilion die, leaving widows and a mother in their wake. Sometime afterwards, Naomi receives word that the famine has ended in Bethlehem, and the city had reclaimed its status as “the house of food.” Ruth accompanies Naomi on her return, and they arrive in Bethlehem in time for the barley harvest. Since neither has a livelihood, they arrive at an opportune time to glean from the harvest, and finally realize their redemption. In the next chapter, we will examine the agricultural process and how gleaners adapted to their new situation.

CHAPTER THREE

After the issues of drought, famine, and migration (Ruth 1:1-6) were dealt with in the last chapter, this chapter will deal with the agricultural process and its relationship to the Book of Ruth. Ruth 2-3 deals with the harvest (and gleaning) until the time of threshing, including the threshing floor incident with Boaz and Ruth. I will seek to also discuss parts of the agricultural cycle not dealt with in the text as such. In this section, I will provide an exegesis of Ruth 2:4-17, 23 and 3:6-13. After each pericope, I will discuss the relevant parts of the agricultural cycle.

An Exegesis of Ruth 2:4-17, 23

4. At that point, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, “May the Lord be with you,” and they replied to him, “May the Lord bless you.”
5. Then Boaz said to his supervisor over the reapers, “To whom does this girl belong?”
6. The supervisor over the reapers answered and said, “She is the Moabite girl who returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab.
7. And she said, ‘Let me follow the reapers and glean among the sheaves.’ She came and has been working hard since morning, sitting down for a short time.”¹

¹זה שבתה הבית מעט “She sat down in the hut / she returned to the house briefly” is problematic to translate because of its odd syntax. The Greek translates the clause as *ου κατεπαυσεν εν αγρω* “She did not stop (working) in the field.” At any rate, the statement speaks of Ruth’s diligence and industriousness.

8. Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter, do not glean at another's field. Also, do not cross over from this field, but stay here with my girls.
9. Keep your eyes on the field where they are reaping and go after the female workers. I will tell the men not to touch you, and when you are thirsty, go to the vessels where the men have drawn water."
10. Then she fell on her face, prostrated herself on the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes and noticed me as I am a foreigner?"
11. So Boaz replied to her, "I was told of all you did for your husband's mother following the death of her husband, and how you left your father, mother, and the land of your birth, and went to a people whom you did not know previously.
12. May the Lord repay your deeds. May your wages be repaid fully by the Lord God of Israel from whom you sought protection beneath his wings."
13. Then she said, "I must have found favor in your eyes because you have comforted me, and you have spoken to the heart of your maidservant even though I am not one of your maidservants."
14. Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here and have some food. Dip your morsel in vinegar." So she sat with the reapers. Then he held out to her some parched grain. Then she ate and was satisfied, and she saved the rest.
15. When she got up to glean, Boaz told his servants, "Let her gather among the sheaves, but do not humiliate her.
16. Also draw out for her among the bundles and leave them so she will gather them up, but do not rebuke her."
17. So she gleaned in the field until evening, and she beat out what she had gathered, and it was about an ephah of barley.
23. So she stayed with Boaz's girls to glean until the finish of the barley and wheat harvests, and she lived with her mother-in-law.

After Naomi and Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22), they confront life without a male breadwinner in their household. Along with the

fatherless, widows and foreigners, Naomi and Ruth rely on gleaning in the local fields for their sustenance. Ruth, younger and probably more physically fit, agrees to find a field in which she could glean. Whether or not she randomly happens upon Boaz's field, as 2:3 seems to suggest, she waits for the owner to arrive to make her request to glean. Whether Ruth had to wait because her request to glean exceeds normal expectations is subject to debate.²

In 2:4, Boaz enters the narrative, as indicated by the הנה particle. According to Adele Berlin, הנה can function in three different ways. First, it can be used in direct discourse "as an emphatic, registering attention or surprise, and best translated by 'Look!'" Second, in narration, it can be used to indicate point of view (Ruth 3:8; 4:1). Third, in the verse in question, הנה is used to introduce "a new figure in an ongoing scene, best translated by 'at that point.'"³ Sasson suggests הנה in this case "may be an attempt on the part of the narrator to clock the arrivals of both Boaz and Ruth within seconds of each other."⁴ However, the interval between the two happenings is not knowable. An overlooked function of הנה can be an expression of mirativity,

²Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. raised this issue in *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 148.

³Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 95. A full discussion of הנה occurs on pp. 91-95.

⁴Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (The Johns Hopkins University Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 46.

or surprise.⁵ This meaning can be applied to Ruth 3:8 as Boaz was not expecting a visit by a woman in the middle of the night.

The latter part of the verse provides a window on social conventions relating to greetings. In this case, the greeting יהוה עמכם is followed by the response, יברכך יהוה. In biblical Hebrew, greetings often have the force of a wish, known as an optative.⁶ These utterances not only are used for greetings but also for leave-taking and expressing thanks.⁷ Other greetings used include שלם לך “Peace to you.” Such greetings have carried over to Christian liturgical worship, especially in the exchange between the clergy and the congregation.⁸ Additionally, liturgical congregations follow the practice by extending the sign of peace to one another. The narrator in the Book of Ruth may be portraying Boaz as a pious “man of substance” by including this greeting, using the divine name, in the narrative. Such greetings are not included elsewhere in the Book of Ruth.

Verse 5 provides a window on the cultural milieu when Boaz asks Ruth’s identity only in the context of “to whom she belongs.” From the answer he receives, Boaz will ascertain whether

⁵See Cynthia L. Miller-Nau and C. H. J. van der Merwe, “הנה and Mirativity in Biblical Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 52 (2011) 57. They follow Delancey’s definition of mirativity which “refers to the linguistic marking for indicating that the information conveyed is new or unexpected to the speaker.” See also S. Delancey, “The Mirative and Evidentiality,” *Journal for Pragmatics* 33 (2001) 369-70.

⁶See Paul Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2005) §163b.

⁷Andy Warren-Fothlin, “Politeness Strategies in Biblical Hebrew and West African Languages,” *Journal of Translation* 3 (2007) 57.

⁸Usually in the form of “The Lord be with you” followed by “And with your spirit.” Also, part of the service includes passing the sign of peace among the congregants.

Ruth is a widow, an orphan (or fatherless), or a foreigner. These three categories are relevant because she is at the field asking permission to glean. The supervisor of the reapers in v. 6 replies that Ruth is a foreigner (a Moabite) and she is associated with Naomi, whom she accompanied on her return from Moab. The second part of the supervisor's response relays Ruth's request to glean. In the interim, Ruth proves her industriousness to the supervisor, only stopping for a short break. Curiously, while the Hebrew says that Ruth sat in a hut (הבית), the Greek renders "in the field" (ἐν ἀγρῷ); therefore the Greek opts for the sense of what the Hebrew says rather than providing a literal translation. Alternate explanations include the Greek having a *Vorlage* without "house" or that the translator considered the word a dittography.⁹ Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky pose the question of whether the Hebrew verb is "sit" (ישב) or "return" (שוב).¹⁰ Regardless, the characterization of Ruth as an industrious person remains.

Several questions become apparent. First, orphans, widows, and sojourners have the right to glean according to the law codes (e.g., Holiness Code in Lev 19:9-10 and the Deuteronomic Law Code in Deut 24:20-21), so why does Ruth ask permission? If she was awaiting permission from the owner, why was she already working, except if there was a pre-existing right to glean? Ruth may have been deferential and polite to the owner. However, if Ruth's request was in addition to the pre-existing right to glean,¹¹ then she would need to gain permission from the land

⁹See the "Commentary on the Critical Apparatus" in the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, 52-53.

¹⁰Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tivka Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth* (The JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011) 33.

¹¹During the harvest, the fields were not to be picked clean, but the corners and whatever the reapers missed were to be left for those with no other means of support, namely the poor and the foreigner in Lev 9:9-10 and the foreigner, fatherless, and widow in the Deut 24:20-21. The

owner. Ruth's request was to glean behind the reapers, among the sheaves. She may have been asking for a preferential position in front of the other gleaners. If this is true, she would need special permission from the owner.¹²

From Boaz's response, he appears kindly disposed toward Ruth, as manifested by his looking out for her security. Not only did he grant Ruth permission to glean exclusively in his field, keeping her eyes on the field where she is gleaning, and to stay with his servant girls, but additionally the men, who may not have good intentions, were warned not to molest Ruth (2:9), taking advantage of her vulnerabilities of being widowed and a foreigner. Ruth was to take water from the vessels which the men had already filled, mitigating another potential risk for Ruth that would have come from being accosted while filling her own water vessels. Boaz's statement may be reflective of a chaos and general lawlessness that existed because of the lack of a central government, as the story is set during the time "when the judges judged." The human condition, especially in Judges 17-21, is summarized by the statement, "There was no king in Israel, and people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25). One especially egregious example is the repeated rape and consequential death of the Levite's concubine by the townspeople of Gibeah while the Levite and his concubine were traveling to the Levite's home at Ephraim after he had retrieved his concubine from her father's house at Bethlehem (Judg 19:15-30). The story is reminiscent of the one in Genesis 19 when the townspeople of Sodom wanted to sexually abuse Lot's guests. As is the case with the Genesis account, where Lot offers his virgin

rationale given in the latter passage is that the Hebrews were once sojourners in Egypt.

¹²Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 33.

daughters to the mob in order to protect his guests, the Ephraimite host¹³ offers his daughter and the Levite's concubine to the townspeople of Gibeah in order to protect himself and his guest. In a desperate act of self-preservation, the Levite throws out his concubine to the mob to be raped until she died.¹⁴ If the climate of Judges 17-21 is the setting of the story of Ruth, Ruth herself would be in an extremely vulnerable position, so her safety would in large part be dependent on how well she follows Boaz's admonitions.

Overwhelmed by Boaz's generosity, Ruth falls to the ground and prostrates herself (חווה)¹⁵ before Boaz, asking why she has found such favor. Here, she identifies herself as a foreigner (נכריה), who has no basic rights, rather than a sojourner (גר), a semi-permanent resident with limited rights, including the right to glean along with the fatherless and the widow, as well as being included into the community.

Boaz extends his permission in response to the favor Ruth enjoys in his eyes due to previous kindness to Naomi when she was widowed and her willingness to leave her family and

¹³Victor Matthews suggests that only citizens can offer hospitality to strangers since sojourners themselves live in the village at the sufferance of the citizens and therefore cannot function as citizens in any legal sense. See Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *BTB* 21 (1991) 14.

¹⁴In both Genesis 19 and Judges 19, women were expendable, especially when male guests are being protected. What was once important to the Levite (his concubine) proves less so in a life or death situation. See Jo Ann Hackett, "Violence and Women's Lives in the Book of Judges," *Interpretation* 58 (2004) 361. As Victor Matthews points out, in both the Genesis 19 and Judges 19 accounts, the guests saved the lives of the hosts. The guests in Genesis 19 acted more honorably in saving the host without sending out the women of the household to the townspeople to be ravaged. See Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22 (1992) 10.

¹⁵In this case, חווה is used of a person who prostrates herself to someone in authority.

homeland because of her loyalty to her mother-in-law (2:11). Boaz concludes his response by wishing that Yhwh repays Ruth in full for the goodness that she showed Naomi, as well as for Yhwh's protection of her under his wing (כנף). Besides actual wings, whether of birds or of mythological creatures such as cherubim and seraphim (and here applied to Yhwh himself), כנף can also refer to the "wing" of a garment that is spread over a chosen bride in a legal custom, as we will see in Ruth 3:9.¹⁶

In verse 13, Ruth states what is obvious to the reader, that she must have found favor with Boaz because of his actions toward her. He spoke to her as a maidservant even though Ruth identifies herself as a total outsider, being both a foreigner and a Moabite. Boaz further reinforces his attitude toward Ruth by including her (therefore treating her as a sojourner) in the mealtime of the reapers by sharing food with her – both the communal bread and parched grain. She was fed to the point of satiety. This is perhaps the first step in including Ruth in the overall community.

After mealtime, Boaz shows further favor to Ruth by allowing her to glean among the sheaves. Additionally, he tells the workers to draw out stalks from the bundles to lay on the ground for Ruth to gather. Verses 15 and 16 are written in parallel fashion with each verse ending with a prohibition against doing anything to humiliate or bother Ruth. Verse 17 provides a summary statement of all that Ruth gleaned that day – an ephah of barley, given all that Boaz commanded the workers in her favor. Interestingly, in her recounting of the day's events, Ruth misstates Boaz's admonition by stating that he said to stay by his workers, to which Naomi

¹⁶See "כנף," in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) 618-20.

responds that it is better to stay by his girls. Ruth works through the end of both the barley and wheat harvests while still living with her mother-in-law. Now my discussion shifts to the agricultural process through the harvest, including elements of the process that are not covered by the text.

The Agricultural Cycle from Plowing to Harvest

Since the storyline of Ruth picks up in Bethlehem during the harvest, nothing is said in Ruth chapter 2 about the plowing and planting parts of the crop cycle. Even though this part of the crop cycle is not needed for the storyline, this period is crucial for the success of the harvest, as well as for the well-being of the inhabitants. Because of this, I will explore the agricultural cycle up to and including the harvest along with the subsequent stages of storage and processing.

The Gezer Calendar informs the reader of the growing seasons, not only for barley and wheat, but for other fruits and vegetables that were part of the diet of the ancient inhabitants of Bethlehem, as is the case in the Book of Ruth. For cereals, the planting season extends from late October to late December, while legumes are planted from late December to late February.¹⁷ Before planting can take place, the field is prepared by plowing, usually after the first rainfall which softens the ground to be plowed. Otherwise the plow cannot easily penetrate the ground, which has been hardened by the heat, dryness, and grazing animals in the interim.¹⁸

¹⁷Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 28.

¹⁸Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 45.

Rainfall

Here, the timing of the first rainfall is crucial. On one hand, if the rainfall comes too early, there may be a long interval between this rainfall and the next rain which could cause the newly-germinated plants to die. If this happens, the field must be replanted, which gives the farmer a late start on his crop.¹⁹ On the other hand, if the rain comes too late, the growing season is shortened which causes the crop not to fully mature, therefore diminishing the crop yield for that year. In both cases, due to poorly-timed rainfall, the crop is not fully successful. For practical purposes, any surplus that had accumulated in previous years would thus be diminished. If no surplus exists, the ancient inhabitants would necessarily have to deal with the shortfall.

Spring rains toward the end of the crop cycle are also crucial for the optimal crop yield of a given year's crop, as without it, the grain becomes stunted, therefore diminishing its yield.²⁰ The spring rains help fill out the heads of the grain crop.

Plowing

The importance of plowing is crucial to the success of the crop. Plows in ancient times, largely unchanged until the early 20th century, were constructed of a wooden frame pulled by animals. The part of the plow that makes contact with the ground, the plow point, consists of a

¹⁹Mette Marie Hald, *A Thousand Years of Farming: Late Chalcolithic Agricultural Practices at Tell Brak in Northern Mesopotamia* (BAR International Series 1880; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008) 11.

²⁰Gustaf Dalman, *Work and Customs in Palestine*, trans. Nadia Abdulhadi-Sukhtian (Ramallah: Dar al Nasher, 2013) 300.

piece of metal such as bronze or iron with a pointed tip that breaks the soil.²¹ The point is elongated to a length of 20 to 30 mm. The plow consists of one or two handles to apply pressure on the point to facilitate soil penetration.²² Introduced into Canaan in the 12th century BCE, iron began to replace bronze as the material for the plow point. For a period of time, bronze and iron plow points coexisted in strata dated to Early Iron Age.²³ After the advent of iron plow points, which potentially are more durable than bronze, it took time for the technology to be perfected. In the meantime, bronze plow points still retained some advantages over their iron counterparts, especially in the more stony soils of hill slopes.²⁴ On the other hand, “bloomery” iron (wrought iron), even when it is cold-worked, is a poor substitute for bronze in terms of its hardness, ductility, and its ability to maintain its sharp edge.²⁵ The process that converts iron into steel, i.e., carburization along with quenching and tempering, produces a metal clearly superior to bronze.²⁶ This metal holds its edge longer in plowing and allows a longer plow point for greater penetration into the soil.²⁷

There are at least two plowings: one to break ground so a field can be planted as well as making the ground more porous to the rainfall, and another plowing after the planting that allows

²¹Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 48-49.

²²Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 51

²³Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 49.

²⁴Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 222.

²⁵Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 218.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 222-23.

the seed to be covered and protected from birds. Alternatively, one's herd of animals can be led over the field to press the seed into the ground, or a bundle of sticks can be dragged over the field which serves the same purpose. According to the Mishna, there are four plowings: one after the harvest, one after the first rain, one deep plowing before planting, and one to cover the seed.²⁸

Planting

Two possible methods of seeding cereal grains are broadcasting and seed drilling. Broadcasting involves manually scattering seed over the area of a freshly plowed field. It is quick, cheap, and reasonably effective in relation to the alternatives, especially when rain falls in a timely manner. Inadequate rainfall can result in delayed emergence of the seedlings due to poorer seed to soil contact.²⁹ In areas where only a minimal amount of rainfall is received, crops may need to be replanted. Also broadcasting may result in an overlap between two adjacent fields, for example, if one field is sown in barley and the other in wheat. Problems may result as barley is harvested about one month before wheat.

Seed drilling involves positioning seeds at their proper depth and covering them. The seed drill was very popular in Mesopotamia and in Israel during Mishnaic times, but there is no direct evidence of the seed drill being used during biblical times.³⁰

²⁸Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 214.

²⁹University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System, "Broadcast Seeding," *The Cereal Sentinel: A Newsletter for Treasure Valley Cereal Producers* 14 (1997) 7.

³⁰Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 54-55.

Tilling and Weeding

During the intervening period, row crops would be tilled and weeded. However, this is not the case with broadcast crops such as wheat and barley. Jesus illustrates this point in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30) because when weeds are pulled up, some of the grain is pulled up as well. The two are allowed to grow together, until they are separated at harvest. To manage the weeds that compete with grain for moisture and nutrients, other strategies must be employed. This will be discussed in the section on mitigation strategies.

Harvest

The cereal crop harvest commences in the springtime, beginning with the barley harvest and continuing with the wheat harvest. In warmer climates, crops mature earlier than in cooler climates.³¹ The harvest commences when the cereal grains are fully ripe, the grain is dehydrated and reduced in size,³² and the ear of the stalk is dry enough to separate the grain from the spikelets. In the first part of the operation, reapers would either use sickles³³ to cut the stalks, or uproot the stalks from the ground. Thereafter, the stalks are tied into sheaves, after which they

³¹Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 57.

³²There are three different types of ripeness. Milk-ripe is when the grain is milky in color and soft in texture. Yellow-ripe is when fluid is within the grain is yellow and sticky. Full ripe grain is dehydrated and reduced in size. See Mordechai E. Kislev, Ehud Weiss, Anat Hartman, and Patty Jo Watson, "Impetus for Sowing and the Beginning of Agriculture: Ground Collecting of Wild Cereals," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 101 (2004) 2693.

³³Flint sickles continued to be used in the Iron Age. See Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 61.

are gathered and transported to the threshing area.³⁴ In chapter two of the book of Ruth, the workers include a foreman (2:6), followed by the reapers (2:3), the maidens (2:8), and young men. The gleaners, which include the poor, widows, the fatherless, and sojourners would gather what is left of the harvest. Water, stored in jars, would be provided to the workers (2:9). When the harvest is finished, the sheaves are taken to the threshing floor to separate the grain from the ears. My discussion will now turn to the text of Ruth dealing with the threshing floor.

An Exegesis of Ruth 3:6-14

After Ruth reports to Naomi how well Boaz had treated her in the field, Naomi, with the knowledge that Boaz is a kinsman-redeemer, begins to form a plan for their long-term security. In contrast with Boaz's admonitions for safe conduct in the field, Naomi's plan would entail significant risk to Ruth's security and reputation – by bathing, anointing herself, and dressing up, as well as going to the threshing floor in the middle of the night – for the reward of a husband and a way for Elimelech's family line to continue.

6. (Ruth) went to the threshing floor, and she did everything her mother-in-law commanded.
7. Boaz ate, drank, and his heart was glad; so he went to lie down at the end of the grain heap, then she came with stealth and uncovered his feet, and she lie down.
8. And it happened at midnight, he was startled, felt around, and behold, a woman was laying at his feet.
9. Then he said, "Who are you?" She replied, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Spread out your wing over your maidservant because you are a kinsman-redeemer."

³⁴Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 57-58.

10. He replied, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have done well in your kindness to be better than the first by not going after younger men, whether poor or rich.
11. “My daughter, do not be afraid. Everything you said I will do for you because all my people at the gate know that you are a woman of substance.
12. “Now it is true that I am a redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I.
13. “Stay the night, and it shall happen in the morning – if he will redeem you, good. Let him redeem you. As the Lord lives, lie down until morning.”

Ruth, adopting Naomi’s plan of gaining a husband and continuing the family line, begins putting her plan in motion. The first part of the plan is to make herself presentable to a man by bathing, perfuming herself, and dressing herself in clothes fitting for the occasion. Second, she makes use of Naomi’s knowledge of Boaz’s habits at harvest time, especially when it is time to winnow the grain. At the end of the day, he would eat, drink to the point where he is “feeling good,” then go to sleep by the grain heap. Eating and drinking were deemed activities that would foster a sense of contentment and well-being.³⁵ The narrator does not provide a reason why Boaz, given his position, would sleep by the grain heap – whether it be to guard it, ensure that no nefarious activities take place, or if his doing so has anything to do with cultic activities connected with the harvest.³⁶ The third part of the plan is for Ruth to “uncover his feet” and lie down beside him. “Uncovering his feet” in the Hebrew is a euphemism for uncovering

³⁵Sasson, *Ruth*, 73.

³⁶Sasson, *Ruth*, 65, mentions that Boaz’s act was “possibly linked to a ceremonial, if not cultic, preparations.” He also mentions an unspecified cultic possibility on page 73 in connection with his discussion of Ruth 3:7.

one's/another's genitals.³⁷ So the plain sense would be to take this as Ruth uncovering Boaz's lower body parts. If this is the case, Ruth is maximizing her leverage for getting Boaz to agree to her request. He would have awakened with his clothes in disarray, not knowing whether Ruth is exploiting the situation by having intercourse with him while he was asleep.³⁸ Kirsten Nielsen takes "uncovering his feet" as Ruth referring to exposing herself, then lying next to Boaz. She cites Ezek 16:8, where Yhwh finds Jerusalem as a naked woman and marries her by spreading his garment over her, as well as Deut 23:1 which is a prohibition against intercourse with one's mother, which is referred to as uncovering his father's nakedness.³⁹ Against the background, Nielsen suggests that Ruth asks Boaz to spread his "wing" over her because she is the one who is naked.

In the middle of the night, Boaz becomes startled and gropes for his garment (3:8). If he is the one who was uncovered, he could have been awakened when his lower body parts became cold, therefore he would be feeling around for his cloak. Jack Sasson suggests the possibility of Boaz's being awakened by a nightmare, especially when he sees the figure of a woman whom he fears might be a Lilith.⁴⁰ At any rate, Boaz awakens and finds a woman. Here, Adele Berlin

³⁷רגל in the dual is probably a euphemism for the pubic region. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, "רגל" in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2001) 1185. However, the author of Ruth uses מרגתיו, making what Ruth did ambiguous to the reader.

³⁸Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) 86-87.

³⁹Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 73-74.

⁴⁰Sasson, *Ruth*, 75-78.

points to another use of the הנה interjection. In this instance, it is an indicator of a point of view.

Here, the narrator tells us about Boaz's perception when he becomes aware of Ruth's presence.⁴¹

However, given the context, הנה may be indicative of his surprise of her appearance. Because

Boaz did not know the identity of the woman lying beside him, he asks (3:9), "Who are you?"

Ruth identifies herself as an אמה. Sasson suggest that in using this term, Ruth imagines herself as

ranking among the females who might be taken by a freeman, either as a concubine or as a wife.⁴²

Compare this with her use of שפחה and נכריה at their initial meeting.⁴³ Note too, that Ruth is not

referred to as "Ruth the Moabite" by the narrator in chapter three, which suggests at least some

degree of acceptance by the community. After Ruth identifies herself, she departs from Naomi's

instructions. Instead of waiting for Boaz to tell her what to do, Ruth tells Boaz what to do. Berlin

suggests that this results from Ruth misunderstanding her mission. While Naomi prepares Ruth

for a romantic encounter, Ruth takes it as getting Boaz to serve as her kinsman redeemer.⁴⁴

Additionally, Berlin suggests that Ruth arrived at the grain heap too late, since she was to arrive

while Boaz was still awake, but while his "heart was good," so that he could instruct Ruth on

what to do.⁴⁵ Robert L. Hubbard sees Naomi preparing Ruth to merely get a husband rather than

⁴¹Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* 91.

⁴²Sasson, *Ruth*, 81.

⁴³Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 211 posits, following Sasson (80-81), that this implies an improved status for Ruth, who progresses from a lowly servant girl to one who is eligible for marriage.

⁴⁴Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 90.

⁴⁵Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 91.

getting herself redeemed.⁴⁶ As Ruth has been living in Bethlehem only a short time, she lacks the intricate knowledge of how the kinsman-redeemer arrangement would function, let alone the order of succession of kinsman-redeemers.

Ruth commands Boaz to “spread your wing over your maidservant because you are a kinsman-redeemer.” In this case, the word כנף is singular in the *ketiv*, while it is plural in the *qere*. The singular would refer to part of Boaz’s clothing, and the gesture of covering (the nakedness of) a woman would function as a symbol of marriage (Ezek 16:8; Deut 22:30 [MT 23:1]; 27:30). The contrast with Hos 2:3 (MT 5), which speaks of the uncovering of nakedness, is blatant.⁴⁷ Whether or not Ruth misunderstood the concept of kinsman-redeemer, Boaz is moved by the request as indicated by his response. Ruth’s execution of her plan, as she understood it, is played to maximum effect, reflecting her knowledge and use of Boaz’s reputation for integrity.

As indicated by his blessing, Boaz feels quite flattered that Ruth would choose him, a man from Naomi’s generation, to marry (3:10). Nielsen suggests that Ruth chose someone from Elimelech’s family to preserve solidarity with Naomi.⁴⁸ Boaz blesses Ruth because this kindness to her mother-in-law that she displays is greater than the kindness she displayed at the moment of Naomi’s and her arrival at Bethlehem. Here, Ruth shows such loyalty when she chooses a kinsman-redeemer from whom Naomi would potentially benefit by having the family line

⁴⁶Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *The Book of Ruth*, 212.

⁴⁷Andre LaCocque, *Ruth* (A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 96.

⁴⁸Nielsen, *Ruth*, 76.

continue.⁴⁹ LaCocque rightly observes that Ruth shows her חסד rather than opting for blind romance – otherwise she would have pursued men of her own generation.⁵⁰ Berlin suggests Boaz’s statement that Ruth does not pursue other men is an excellent comparator, which places side-by-side what did and what did not happen.⁵¹

In the next verse (3:11), Boaz assures Ruth that her request would be fulfilled because everyone at the city gate knows she is a אשת חיל, a “woman of substance.” This term refers to the covenant loyalty that Ruth has shown, both when Naomi was widowed and also when she asks Boaz to be her kinsman-redeemer.⁵² LaCocque adds that this חסד transcends everything else which pales in comparison to it, such as the אהבה in the Song of Songs.⁵³

In 3:12, the language begins to get somewhat complicated, at the point when Boaz admits that he is not the redeemer who is next in line. Whether Boaz is stammering or showing hesitation, clearly Boaz is kindly disposed toward Ruth’s request, but the outcome remains in suspense, pending satisfaction of the legal formalities that would happen at the city gate the following day. Jack Sasson discusses the textual difficulties of the verse at length and suggests

⁴⁹See Ruth 4:14-17.

⁵⁰LaCocque, *Ruth*, 98.

⁵¹Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 106.

⁵²Compare Prov 12:4 and 31:10.

⁵³LaCocque, *Ruth*, 99.

three possibilities.⁵⁴ First, **כִּי אֲמֵנָה** may be treated as a compound asseverative adverb.⁵⁵ Therefore **אֲמֵנָה כִּי** might be treated as conjoined particles, which affects the clause that immediately follows. Second, **כִּי אֲמֵנָה** may be treated as an asseverative adverb. The first **כִּי** might either be treated as a conjunction (when, since, because) or as an emphatic article (behold). The word **אֲמֵנָה**, usually a (interrogative) conjunctive, remains difficult to parse. This word is the Masoretes' candidate for deletion, since it may have been transposed from the verb **אֲמֵנָה יִגְאֹלֶךְ** in the next verse. Third, the first **כִּי** could be treated as a conjunction, with **אֲמֵנָה** as an asseverative adverb, and **אֲמֵנָה כִּי** as the conjoined particle. Sasson chooses the third option as consistent with his understanding the words of verse 12 as explanatory in nature.⁵⁶

The burning question still remains: “Did anything happen of an intimate nature between Ruth and Boaz?” Boaz tells Ruth to spend the night. However, the question of who will redeem Ruth is still unresolved. Even though Boaz may be willing, the ultimate resolution is outside his control. Also the narrator’s word choice, **לֵינִי**, from the root **לָן** “to pass the night,” is more concerned with the passage of time than in the manner in which the time is passed. Additionally, this word does not bear sexual connotations (compare **שָׁכַב**, to sleep).⁵⁷ LaCocque suggests that to send Ruth home without further ado would expose her to humiliation as well as to the dangers of

⁵⁴Sasson, *Ruth*, 89.

⁵⁵To asseverate is to assert positively.

⁵⁶Sasson, *Ruth*, 89.

⁵⁷Sasson, *Ruth*, 90. See also Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 212.

a female being out in the middle of the night.⁵⁸ At any rate, Boaz will ensure that Ruth is redeemed, whether by the unnamed redeemer or by Boaz himself. My next section will shift to discussing the agricultural cycle from threshing through processing and storage.

The Agricultural Cycle from Threshing through Processing

After the sheaves of grain were gathered, the grain would be separated from the harvested plant. In smaller operations by individual gleaners, as for example, Ruth in 2:17, the grain would be beaten with a stick. This method would also be used in the event of a siege, as threshing floors are located outside the city walls and therefore could not be defended. The precise location of the operation was determined by topography. After being harvested, the sheaves would be taken to a threshing floor. The threshing floor served as a venue for public functions – both legal (e.g., the request Ruth would make of Boaz for redemption) and sacred (see 1 Kgs 22:10; 2 Chr 18:9).⁵⁹ Therefore, some threshing floors may have been publicly owned.⁶⁰ In large operations, animals were utilized in the threshing process, whether to trample over the stalks or to pull the threshing sledge, a farm implement made up of wooden planks, turned up at the front to prevent the sledge

⁵⁸LaCocque, *Ruth*, 102.

⁵⁹See Jaime L. Waters, *Threshing Floors in Ancient Israel: Their Ritual and Symbolic Significance* (Emerging Scholars; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) 148-49 who concludes that Yhwh is connected with the agricultural as well as the sacred aspects of the threshing floor.

⁶⁰See Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 62-63.

from digging into the threshing floor, with its bottom embedded with stones or iron.⁶¹ Wheel threshers, two or more rows of wheels attached to a frame, might also be used.⁶²

Winnowing

After threshing, the grain is separated from the chaff and other impurities, in a process which consists of three steps. The first step involves winnowing, in which threshed material is thrown into the air with a winnowing fork. The wind carries the lighter material (chaff) away, while the heavier material (grain) falls to the ground. The second step involves further cleaning in which the remaining material is thrown into the air with a wooden shovel. This works on the same principle as winnowing, which results in collecting grain in a heap. The third step involves two sieves, the first of which collects material such as small stones, while allowing the grain to fall through. The second sieve allows the small particles to fall through while the grain is collected.⁶³

Storage

After the operations mentioned above, the grain is stored. Most is stored for food while the remainder is reserved for the next season's planting. In either case, premature germination is a problem that would render the grain useless for these purposes. For food, the germ of the grain

⁶¹Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 63-65.

⁶²An example was found at Tell el-Farah (south). See Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 65.

⁶³*Ibid.*

is killed by heating it at a high temperature to prevent germination during storage, whether the grain is stored in above-ground or below-ground facilities.⁶⁴ In the case of grain that will be used as seed for the next crop season, the farmer must pay attention to conditions where the grain is stored to maintain dormancy, as seeds of many varieties are dormant at harvest. For example, the dormancy of barley would be overcome in 1 to 6 months when stored at 40° C.⁶⁵ Also, attention has to be paid to the problems of moisture and pests such as insects and rodents. Moisture, besides causing premature germination, also generates mold and fungi. The last and most dramatic effect of mold is heating.⁶⁶ Therefore seed grain needs to be stored in a cool, dry environment, once the seeds have been allowed to dry. It must be stored in a container that will keep out insects and rodents.

During the Iron Age, grain was stored in both above-ground and subterranean facilities (see tables below).⁶⁷ The following are above-ground facilities.

Type	Purpose	Use
Granary (Sometimes subterranean)	Bulk storage	Public
Storehouse	Freestanding building where foodstuffs are stored in containers	Public
Public Storeroom	Room in public building where grain is stored in containers	Public

⁶⁴Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 71.

⁶⁵Oren L. Justice and Louis N. Bass, *Principles and Practices of Seed Storage* (Agriculture Handbook 506; Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 1978) 20.

⁶⁶Justice and Bass, *Principles and Practices of Seed Storage*, 86.

⁶⁷See Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 72.

Private Storeroom	Interior or exterior room of a private dwelling where grain is stored in containers	Private
-------------------	---	---------

The following are below-ground facilities.

Type	Purpose	Use
Grain Pit	Small stone-lined or plastered pit in close relation with a domestic area	Private
Silo	A larger version of a grain pit, but it is in close relationship with a public area	Public
Cellar	Subterranean room where grain is stored in jars.	Depends whether associated with private or public buildings

Grain storage facilities point to both a private and public storage of grain. A primary need for each family is to store enough grain to feed themselves until the next harvest. Grain was also important at a public level as a storage facility was a way of storing general reserves for years of drought and famine. Governments that are shrewd in the times of plenty will not only have reserves for themselves but will also have commodities to sell to neighboring nations (e.g., Genesis 41-43).

Processing

Grain can be parched, or it can be ground into flour. It can be eaten in bread or in a porridge. How grain is processed depends on the properties of each type of wheat or barley. For example, gluten is found in Near Eastern cereals. “Glutenins and Gliadins are storage proteins

found in the starchy endosperm of cereals belonging to the *triticeae* tribe of grasses.”⁶⁸ Upon mixture with water, the glutenins and gliadins are hydrated and form gluten. When dough ferments, the bacteria present in the flour causes the dough to rise because of the carbon dioxide produced. Some bakers add a leavening agent to increase the speed and height of the rise. When the bread is baked, the gluten loses its elasticity and becomes firm. The harder the seed, the greater the starch damage, requiring additional water to make the dough swell. Bread wheats make the best bread. In contrast, emmer and durum wheats contain weakly-developed gluten that does not leaven well. These hard wheats have high water absorption, important in making flatbreads.⁶⁹ Barley also has gluten, but it is unsuitable for leavening because of its chemical composition.⁷⁰ At sites in Moab such as Humayma and Khirbat Mudaybi, two-row barley make up the plurality of the grains discovered followed by durum wheat and emmer wheat.⁷¹ In a silo

⁶⁸Diane Lyons and A. Catherine D’Andrea, “Griddles, Ovens, and Agricultural Origins: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Bread Baking in Highland Ethiopia,” *American Anthropologist* 105 (2003) 523.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Lyons and D’Andrea. “Griddles, Ovens, and Agricultural Origin” 524.

⁷¹See J. Ramsey, “Plant Remains” in *Humayma Excavation Project 2: Nabatean Campground and Necropolis, Byzantine Churches, and Early Islamic Domestic Structures* (ASOR Archaeological Reports 18; Boston: ASOR, 2013) 353. Here, barley grains made up 40 per cent of the grains followed by durum wheat with 4.27 per cent and indeterminate wheat grains at 3.09 per cent. See also Alys Vaughan-Williams, *An Interpretation of the Archaeobotanical Remains from Khirbet al-Mudaybi* (Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis; Sheffield: Sheffield University, 2000) 33, 57. In this study, two-row barley made up the plurality of grains followed by durum wheat, emmer wheat, and bread wheat. The ratio of bread wheat to durum is 1:10.

excavated at Shiloh, as well as others sites in the Near East, a now-extinct wheat has been found, known as *Triticum parvicoccum*.⁷²

Mitigation Strategies

Cereal grains, though a staple of the Iron Age diet, deplete the soil of its nutrients. Compounding the problem are the weeds and pests that accompany growing the same crop year after year. Several strategies can be employed to mitigate these problems. In this section, I will explore fallowing, crop rotation, and intercropping as examples of such strategies.

The aims of fallowing include improving soil structure, increasing nutrient content, as well as breaking the cycle of crop pests and diseases.⁷³ Fallows range from about 20 years to as short as one year. The first we read of fallowing is in reference to the “Sabbath Year” in the Covenant Code (Exod 23:10-11) and Holiness Code (Lev 25:1-7) which was intended to give the land rest every seventh year. The question is whether a seventh-year fallow is sufficient for the land to recover from soil depletion that is caused by continual growing of cereal crops. Hopkins

⁷²See Mordecai E. Kislev, “*Triticum Parvicoccum* sp. nov., the Oldest Naked Wheat,” *Israel Journal of Botany* 28 (1980) 98. Also see *idem*, “Food Remains,” in *Shiloh: The Archaeology of a Biblical Site*, eds. Israel Finkelstein, Shlomo Bunimovitz, and Zvi Lederman (Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University 10; Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, 1993) 354-61.

⁷³Cecile Villenave, Tom Bongers, Klemens Ekschmitt, Djibril Djigal, and Jean Luc Chotte, “Changes in Nematode Communities Following Cultivation of Soils after Fallow Periods of Different Length,” *Applied Soil Ecology* 17 (2001) 43.

suggests that having one fallow year in seven is not enough to replenish soil fertility.⁷⁴ This type of fallow system would border on high intensity to continuous farming with no fallow.⁷⁵

Bare fallow, without a cover crop, is labor-intensive. To achieve full advantage of the fallow, the ground is plowed to retain moisture, therefore breaking the capillary effect which dries out uncultivated ground through evaporation. Consequently, while the surface of the plowed ground is dry, the underneath part retains its moisture.⁷⁶ David Hopkins suggests that one year of cultivation was followed by one year of fallow. To ensure continuous production, a landowner's field would be divided into plots, some plots under cultivation and others under fallow.⁷⁷

Another strategy to replenish the soil is to alternate between crops, such as cereals, that deplete the soil and crops, such as legumes, that add nutrients to the soil. A middle position between fallow and crop rotation is to plant a leguminous cover crop in the place of having a plot of land lie in a bare fallow, which Hopkins refers to as a "green fallow."⁷⁸ Besides replenishing the soil, a cover crop is an important step in soil conservation as it prevents topsoil erosion.

⁷⁴Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 192.

⁷⁵Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 194.

⁷⁶Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 193.

⁷⁷Hopkins posits two different models of fallowing. Under "System A" a summer crop is followed by a winter crop, followed by a fallow year until the next summer crop. "System B" begins with a summer crop followed by a winter crop, followed by next winter's crop followed by a fallow year until next summer's crop. See Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 198.

⁷⁸Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 195.

Planting a leguminous spring crop can mitigate against depletion that a cereal crop would bring.⁷⁹ Since the growing season of a spring crop is outside the rainy season, suitable candidates would be crops that do not need as much water, such as chickpeas.⁸⁰ Other legumes and pulses require more rainfall. The chickpea begins as a crop sown in the autumn, but in the springtime experienced severe losses because of *Ascochyta* blight, which was problematic at cooler temperatures and leaf wetness.⁸¹ This blight relegated the chickpea to a garden crop until the advent of a warm-weather variety of chickpea from Africa/Asia during the Early Bronze Age and the application of summer cropping practices.⁸²

⁷⁹Legumes found in the Near East include bitter vetch (*Vicia ervilia*), lentil (*Lens culinaris*), horse bean (*Vicia faba*), and chick peas (*Cicer arietinum*). See Megan Perry, Mahmoud Y. el-Najjar, Michael Finnegan, David S. Reese, and Jennifer Ramsay, "Human, Animal, and Plant Remains," in *Humayma Excavation Project: Nabatean Campground and Necropolis, Byzantine Churches and Early Islamic Domestic Structures*, eds. John Peter Oleson and Robert Schick (ASOR Archaeological Reports 18; Boston: ASOR, 2013) 377. In Kislev's "Food Remains," 355-57, only bitter vetch, lentils, and horse beans are mentioned as having been found.

⁸⁰Chickpeas require only good early spring precipitation, so Shahal Abbo, Simcha Lev-Yadun, and Avi Gopher, "Yield Stability: An Agronomic Perspective on the Origin of Near Eastern Agriculture," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 19 (2010) 147.

⁸¹*Ascochyta* blight is a fungal plant disease of chickpeas, peas, alfalfa, and other legumes. Such measures can be taken against the blight with host resistance, using healthy seed, fungicides and crop rotation. It is not known how many of these measures would have been available to ANE farmers. See M. V. Wiese, W. J. Kaiser, L. J. Smith, F. J. Muehlbauer, *The Ascochyta Blight of the Chickpea* (Agriculture Experimental Station Bulletin 886 rev.; Moscow, ID: University of Idaho College of Agriculture, 1995) 1-4.

⁸²See Shahal Abbo, Dan Shtienberg, Judith Lichtenzweig, Simcha Lev-Yadun, and Avi Gopher, "The Chickpea, Summer Cropping, and a New Model for Pulse Domestication in the Ancient Near East," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 78 (2003) 443. See page 445 for the date of the advent of the warm-weather variety of chickpea.

Crop rotation is a method where two or more crops are grown in a rotation in the same field over the space of several years. This contrasts with growing the same crop in the same field year after year, which is known as a monoculture.⁸³ A crop rotation involving nitrogen-binding legumes replenishes the nutrients that cereal crops depleted and has additional benefits of weed and pest control. Weeds typically grow with crops that have growth requirements and characteristics similar to their own.⁸⁴ Crop rotation counteracts the advantage that weeds have when the same crop is raised year after year. Additionally, the combination of cereals and pulses may be seen as insurance against crop failure, a cropping strategy which provides a higher level of heterogeneity.⁸⁵

Another possible strategy is intercropping, which is the raising of two crops in alternating rows in the same field, contrasting with raising one crop per field. For instance, while I was in Jordan, I saw wheat growing in the midst of an olive orchard. By the time olives became ripe, the wheat would have already been harvested. Two categories of intercropping exist: (1) if the farmer is primarily interested in the yield of the main crop, another crop is intersown into the main crop to insure against crop failure, and to promote erosion control, improvement in soil fertility, and weed control; and (2) if the farmer is primarily interested in the yield of each component, he would intersow in such a way to minimize interference between crops and generate desirable yields.

⁸³Matt Liebman and Elizabeth Dyck, "Crop Rotation and Intercropping Strategies for Weed Management," *Ecological Applications* 3 (1993) 92.

⁸⁴Liebman and Dyck, "Crop Rotation and Intercropping Strategies," 93.

⁸⁵Abbo, Lev-Yadun, and Gopher, "Yield Stability," 147.

Conclusion

When the reader rejoins the story in Ruth 2, it is the beginning of the harvest. Having realized their new reality as widows with no other means of support, Naomi and Ruth agree that the younger of the two will glean the fields for their subsistence. Whether by happenstance or due to Ruth's being prompted by Naomi, Ruth appeared at Boaz's field. When the owner arrived at the field, Ruth quickly gained favor once word got to him about her loyalty to Naomi. Consequently, Ruth receives preferential treatment beyond what would be granted to the common gleaner.

When the barley and wheat harvests were completed, Naomi's thoughts turn toward security, not only for Ruth but also for herself. This brings the reader to Ruth 3 with the encounter between Boaz and Ruth at the threshing floor. She devises a plan that Ruth was to activate, but instead of waiting for Boaz to tell her what to do, Ruth tells Boaz what to do. Being the honorable person that he is, he ensures that the question of Ruth's destiny will be answered. Through his shrewdness, the issue is resolved in his favor.

I have discussed the agricultural cycle, filling in the parts that the writer did not regard as essential for the story of Ruth. Though not essential for the story, the farmer's skill in plowing, planting, and growing, along with mitigation strategies such as fallowing and crop rotation, is crucial for the survival and continuation of society. The news of the return of ample and timely rainfall – the break in the famine – prompted Naomi's return to Bethlehem. The harvest provided the occasion for Ruth to glean the fields to provide for her and Naomi's subsistence. Whether by happenstance or intention, Ruth met Boaz, who would be instrumental in the two women's near-term sustenance by his favor and long-term security for her and Naomi.

In the next chapter, I will synthesize chapters two and three in examining the effects of migration, farming, and ecology on the plight of the fatherless, foreigner, and widow with reference to the Book of Ruth. I will also analyze options for the poor depending on the climate, including gleaning at local farms or migrating to more fertile land in the event of a drought. Finally, I will offer conclusions and will make suggestions for future study.

CHAPTER FOUR

In chapters two and three of this study, the storyline highlights the common thread of agriculture. Chapter one of the book of Ruth begins with a famine which causes at least Elimelech and his family to leave Bethlehem for Moab in hopes of improving their situation. After the death of Elimelech and his two sons, Naomi, bereft of her support system except for Ruth, returns to Bethlehem after hearing that the famine had abated. Still, Naomi was so embittered by her circumstances that she tells her friends to call her “Mara.” Chapter two of Ruth begins with the reality of the two widows having to support themselves. Support for those in their situation was provided in the form of gleaning rights. Ruth agrees to glean for them both, and she “happens” upon Boaz’s field. Here, her (and Naomi’s) fortunes begin to turn for the better. Boaz is kindly disposed toward Ruth because he has heard of the loyalty and kindness she has shown toward Naomi. Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is one of her kinsman and later hatches a plan to get Boaz to marry Ruth, and therefore to bring redemption for them both.

In this chapter, first I shall discuss how migration makes Elimelech and his family “sojourners” in Moab and how that serves as a foil to the principle of showing kindness to the sojourner. The family sojourned in Moab until all their males died, leaving Naomi alone with her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth. How Naomi, being both a foreigner and a widow, accumulated the resources to return to Bethlehem is not indicated to the reader. Second, I shall discuss how the fortunes of the poor, including the orphan, widow, and sojourner, are governed by the success

or failure of yearly crops. Crop success would mean more sustenance for the poor in the form of gleaning rights and tithes. Conversely, crop failures would mean less for the poor. Finally, I will draw conclusions based on the totality of this study. During the course of this activity, I will suggest subjects for further study.

Migration and the Poor

Migration is but one part of a coping strategy that a family may employ to ride out a famine.¹ Before taking that step, some strategies may involve cutting back on the amount of food consumed, eating less desirable food (i.e., barley, bitter vetch²), employing more fillers to stretch the food supply, such as chaff and the like. Steps may also be taken to borrow food from others or from a community storehouse. At some point, the decision may be made to migrate to areas that are faring better.

Speaking of migration and the poor, some considerations enter into the decision of whether or not to migrate. First, how bad does a famine have to get to motivate a person or family to move? Second, there is the question of what becomes of a family's own property when they return after the famine is over. Third, who are the best candidates for migration in times of

¹Coping strategies are responses to a temporary situation. As famine extends into the longer term, those affected adapt to what would become the "new normal." See Susanna Davies, "Are Coping Strategies a Cop Out?" *IDS Bulletin* 24 (1993) 60.

²Bitter vetch (*vicia ervilia*), also known as "camel vetch," was eaten by the poor in times of famine. See Daniel Zohary, Maria Hopf, and Ehud Weiss, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Domesticated Plants in South-West Asia, Europe, and the Mediterranean Basin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 92.

famine, and how does Elimelech fit in this scenario? Finally, which groups are more likely to migrate, and how much in the way of resources are needed to migrate?

In the Hebrew Bible, there are other stories of migration in order to gain food for sustenance. In the cases of Abraham (Gen 12:10-16), Isaac (Gen 26:1-22), and Jacob (Gen 41:53-42:5) along with his twelve sons, were semi-nomadic pastoralists for whom migrating was a necessity to find pasture land for their flocks as well as finding food for themselves. Elimelech is an example of a farmer who left his plot of land / usufruct in order to find food for his family. Besides these examples, legislation is found in the Hebrew Bible on how those who sojourned on Israelite land should be treated, this indicating the presence of resident aliens. In the story of Ruth, we read of Naomi's return migration as a widow – understandable because Bethlehem would provide a support system for her. In turn, we read of Ruth's migration accompanying Naomi despite the latter's urging Ruth to go back to her ancestral home.

Migration is one of the last options people would exercise in the face of a prolonged famine. Families tend to stay for fear of losing their land and possibly their livelihood, especially if they had any intent of returning when the famine has ended. For example, during the famine in Darfur in the mid-1980s, its citizens preferred to go hungry so as to protect their assets and preserve their livelihoods.³ Another motivation for staying would be the dilemma of whether to stay and suffer with their fellow-citizens or abandon them in the face of adversity. In the case of Elimelech, the Book of Ruth itself did not comment positively or negatively on his leaving Bethlehem. However, as shown in chapter one, a negative view of Elimelech has been taken by some, such as in *Ruth Rabbah*, because of the perceived abandonment of his community.

³Davies, "Are Coping Strategies a Cop Out?" 60.

For migration to occur, the family's situation would have to degenerate to the point where they could no longer deal with their circumstances. For example, for pastoralists, if there is no water for their flocks, they would be compelled to find water and pasture lands elsewhere for the flock to graze. For farmers, if there seems to be no prospect for the famine's ending, they face the difficult decision of whether to migrate for self-preservation. Even given the importance of preserving land or livelihood, neither will be of any consequence if individuals or families do not survive. Some additional "push" factors which might motivate some to migrate include increase in drought frequency, water shortage, unreliable harvests, decline in crop production for consumption, and shifting seasonal rainfalls.⁴ Before the decision is made to migrate, families exhaust their options by consuming their surplus, switching to more drought-resistant crops, and buying grain from the marketplace with credit against future yields.

In applying the above considerations to Elimelech's situation in the Book of Ruth, we must now look at who among a city's inhabitants would be most likely to leave in the event of a prolonged famine. Earlier in this chapter, we noticed a strong "pull" toward staying in one's own community to preserve one's ancestral lands and livelihood. In light of this, if there is nothing to keep a person in the community such as land, then that person would more likely migrate for food, and therefore, self-preservation. The question is, however, whether landless farmers would have the necessary resources to migrate successfully. Because of the lack of resources, the poor would be least equipped to migrate. On the other end of the spectrum, larger farmers would no

⁴Tamer Afifi, Emma Liwenga, and Lukas Kwezi, "Rain-Induced Crop Failure, Food Insecurity, and Out-Migration in Same-Kilimanjaro, Tanzania," *Climate and Development* 6 (2014) 59.

doubt have the resources to successfully navigate a migration.⁵ The question that presents itself then is when would it cease to make business sense to stay in one's ancestral land. According to the Book of Ruth, Elimelech's share of the land was not lost but became part of the transaction of Boaz's marriage to Ruth and redemption of Naomi. The reader is not told whether Elimelech's migration was intended to be temporary or permanent. The name of Bethlehem, the "house of bread," adds a point of irony in this story of citizens migrating because there is no food – the main "push" factor toward migrating out. However, the choice of Moab as a destination may reflect some of the "pull" factors for migrating in, such as news via word of mouth of successful crops brought to Bethlehem by Moabites traveling in the area, traders, or by relatives who have been living in Moab. After Elimelech's migration, his family remained in Moab over ten years, through the deaths of Elimelech and both sons. Only when news came that the famine was over did Naomi, now bereft of her male family members, decide to return to Bethlehem, which again had food.

Agriculture and the Fortunes of the Poor

Ideally, as crops succeed for farmers, so do the fortunes for the poor, including the orphan, widow, and sojourner, because there is more to glean, and in turn, more to tithe for the benefit of the poor, provided of course that gleaning and tithing legislations are being followed. Conversely, crop failures mean less for farmers and the poor alike as there would be less for all.

⁵See Afifi, Liwenga, and Kwezi, "Rain-Induced Crop Failure," 58. In three study sites in Tanzania, the rate of migration was greatest among the large farmers at 2.46 migrants per household followed by landless farmers at 1.06 migrants per household, and small farmers at 0.65 migrants per household.

Regarding Elimelech's family's sojourn in Moab, the reader is not given any details of the hospitality given to them by the Moabites, or concerning Moabite legislation in regard to foreigners. All the reader knows is, even after the death of Elimelech, that the family resided more than ten years with the sons marrying Moabite women. During this time, Moab would have enjoyed, for the most part, successful harvests. It was only after the evaporation of Naomi's support system combined with the cessation of the famine in Bethlehem that Naomi decided to return to her hometown, accompanied by her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

As Naomi and Ruth were making their return migration to Bethlehem, they would be facing a "new normal." Neither had males in their household to support them. Their source of support, in the near term, was to glean from the fields, which were fraught with its own dangers. Since Ruth was younger, she was the one designated as the gleaner. Whether or not Ruth simply "happened" on Boaz's field, news of her loyalty to Naomi made a positive impression on him to the point of his looking out for her personal safety, despite the fact that Ruth, a Moabite, identified herself as a foreigner, rather than a sojourner. Later, Naomi would develop a plan to ensure their long-term security.

The Farmer's Interconnectedness with the Fortunes of the Poor

The fortunes of the farmer/landowner and the poor are interlinked. Since the poor have little means of support on their own, they are dependent on the harvests of the farmer for enough food to last until the next harvest. The poor are also at the mercy of the farmer's abiding by the legislation found in the various law codes, namely, the Covenant, Priestly, and Deuteronomic.

The more generous the farmer is above the prescribed minimum, the more the poor are aided in their quest for subsistence.⁶

Because the farmer is literally the breadwinner for his family, he is duty-bound to use all the skills at his command to ensure a successful crop. As discussed in the last chapter, many elements have to fall into place for a good harvest, one of which is good fortune. The rains at the beginning of the growing season must come at the right time to soften the ground for plowing. After plowing, the seed is planted or broadcasted, and needs covering for protection from the birds. After planting, well-timed rains are needed for germination of the seed and to ensure that the seedlings grow to maturity. In the interim, depending on the particular crop, the farmer needs to protect it from weeds and animals that are wont to consume the growing plants prior to harvest. Ultimately, the crop needs to be harvested and processed. During harvest time, the farmer's adherence to legislation regarding the poor was tested as well as his generosity. This will be discussed more fully at a later point.

Additionally, the farmer's ecological skill would be evidenced in various strategies to restore nutrients to the soil and to protect against soil erosion. Fallowing, which is biblically legislated every seven years, gives the land a rest. As discussed in the previous chapter, a seven-year fallow is only a bare minimum, while a more frequent fallow is optimal for it to have its full effect. Crop rotation, though not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (including the Book of Ruth), is another strategy to replenish nutrients to the soil. Even a leguminous summer crop such as

⁶Robert A. Oden, Jr., "Taxation in Biblical Israel," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12 (1984) 168-69, discusses gleaning rights, as well as the sabbatical year and Jubilee year as a form of taxation, in which part of a farmer's crop is levied for the poor.

chickpeas can fulfill this purpose. Farmers also employed terracing in order to fight against soil erosion, especially in hilly country.

At this point, I will discuss the legislation for taking care of the poor in the land, often referred to as the orphan, the widow, and the resident alien. The common element linking these three groups is the lack of a system to support them on a specific scale.⁷ In Exod 22:22-23:9, the overall theme is the prevention of injustice to the least of society. Yhwh is portrayed in 22:21 as the protector of those who do not have access to the legal system as the rich do. Yhwh himself pledges to deal harshly with those who afflict the orphan and the widow to the point of making their wives widows and their children fatherless. As for the alien, 22:21 and 23:9 form an *inclusio* with their rationale for protecting the alien, because the Israelites were once aliens themselves in the land of Egypt.

The Holiness Code offers illumination on how more specifically the less fortunate would be cared for. When harvest time comes, farmers are not to harvest in an exhaustive way; rather, some of the crop was to be left for the less fortunate. Lev 19:10 stipulates that the vineyard was not to be stripped bare, but a portion, including grapes that have fallen on the ground, was to be left for the poor and the alien. Concerning grain fields, Lev 23:22 stipulates that their corners are neither to be reaped nor the gleanings to be gathered, but these are to be left for the poor and the alien. Similarly it is stipulated in Deuteronomic Law Code (Deut 24:19-22) concerning grain, olives, and grapes, that some of the produce should be left for the less fortunate, because the Israelites themselves had been slaves in the land of Egypt.

⁷See Mark Sneed, "Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?" *ZAW* 111 (1999) 500.

In the Book of Ruth, Boaz, a man of substance, is an example of one who abided by the biblical legislation regarding the gleaning rights of the widow, orphan, and the alien. Concerning Ruth herself, Boaz showed generosity beyond what was required. Having heard of the kindness that Ruth extended to Naomi, Boaz looked out for Ruth. He told her not to glean in another's field, given the uncertainty as to whether other landowners would treat her as kindly. Within his own domain, Boaz warned his men not to mistreat Ruth, while warning her to stay with his servant girls. He further demonstrated his acceptance of Ruth by having her eat with him and the workers at mealtime, giving her some bread and some parched grain. After lunch, she was allowed to glean among the sheaves, and he had his workers to draw out stalks from the bundles of grain for Ruth to pick up. To say that Boaz was generous beyond the minimum would be a gross understatement.

Conclusions

From this study, five main conclusions can be drawn. First, migration was seen as a viable alternative to starvation in the event of a prolonged famine. Even though Elimelech's family is the only one mentioned in the Book of Ruth as having migrated, and given the severity and the duration of the famine according to the narrative, they might not have been the only ones who migrated in the situation depicted. The Book of Ruth itself does not make a judgement on Elimelech's decision. The writer reports straightforwardly on the deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion. The sons' names are suggestive of their frail physical condition but are not indicative of the rightness or wrongness of their decision to marry Moabite women. Migration continues to be a viable option in modern times whether a family is searching for food, escaping

warfare, or searching for work in their chosen occupation. When a family migrated, whether in ancient or modern times, those who stayed behind no doubt felt abandoned and resentful. This may account for the Mishnaic interpretation of Elimelech's, Mahlon's, and Chilion's deaths in the Book of Ruth as being connected with their leaving Bethlehem during a famine.

Second, when the primary means of support disappears during migration, survivors (e.g., Naomi in the Book of Ruth) are likely to engage in return migration, especially if they receive news that the famine has ended in their homeland. In the story of Ruth, Naomi had some relatives still residing in Bethlehem that she could rely upon for support, whether she is looking for prospective plots to glean or for other types of support. Even though this is not mentioned in the Book of Ruth, Naomi may have guided Ruth to plots that were tended by relatives. In this sense, Ruth could have "happened" upon a plot tended by Boaz, i.e. not seeking his plot specifically. The story remains unclear on this point.

Third, even the most skillful farmer is at the mercy of natural phenomena – weather, pests, and plant diseases. Rainfall is a basic need for a successful crop – a crucial factor behind both the famine at the beginning of the Book of Ruth and its cessation. Depending on the crop, whether wheat or barley, a successful dry-farming crop needs at least 300 mm (wheat) or 250 mm (barley) of rainfall per annum for a successful harvest. Another rainfall variable is the timing of the rainfalls. The first rainfall needs to happen at the beginning of the growing season so that the ground can be softened enough for plowing. Yet another rain would need to happen so seeds can germinate and the seedlings can survive to grow to maturity. Toward harvest, rainfall is needed in order for the yield to be optimal for harvest time. Whether it was the lack of cumulative rainfall or the lack of timely rainfall, either factor might have contributed to the

famine depicted in the Book of Ruth. Even when rainfall comes at its appointed times, farmers still had to manage pests and plant diseases – threats to crops which are not totally in the farmer’s control.

Fourth, provided the weather, pests, and diseases cooperate, the farmer’s skill has a direct bearing on whether a given crop year is a success or a failure. An experienced farmer has developed skills in plowing, planting and covering seed, tending the crop, harvesting, processing, and storage. Additionally, the skillful farmer develops ecological techniques, including conserving the soil through terracing, and conserving the nutrients of the soil through crop rotation and fallowing, the latter above and beyond the sabbath-year fallow. The wise farmer also shows some foresight by storing some of the produce beyond what is needed, so that there will be enough to mitigate suffering in times of famine. Even though the crop growing cycle is not addressed in the Book of Ruth, the farmer’s skill forms the background which helps the reader to better understand how a successful harvest could be obtained – enough for the farmer’s family as well as for the poor.

Fifth, the fortunes of the farmer and the poor, namely the orphan, widow, and sojourner, are intertwined. The gleaning system, along with the sabbath year, legislated in the law codes of the Hebrew Bible, are deeply linked to the agricultural economy like the one depicted in the Book of Ruth. The effectiveness of this legislation is dependent on the farmer’s adherence to these laws as well as his generosity. Boaz is a prime example of a person with a sterling reputation as a man of substance who is also generous. He displayed this trait with Ruth in allowing her to glean among the sheaves. He went the extra mile in looking out for her safety by advising her to stay with the women and to glean only in his field where her safety can be

guaranteed. In part, his attention was in return for the loyalty Ruth showed toward Naomi when the latter lost her husband and sons. What is not addressed in the Book of Ruth is the dilemma about how much of a bumper crop is given to the poor and how much is held in reserve, or in times of famine, how much of the reserves are to be given to the poor.

Subjects for Further Study

Given the state of current events, several topics can be explored using what we have learned from the Book of Ruth and how these lessons can be used for the betterment of society. Social criticism has proven worthy of exploration in conjunction with a Post-Colonial reading of the Book of Ruth. Migrants are a prime example of a class of people who have been unfairly treated in many societies, ancient and modern. The Book of Ruth can be read from the point of view of the Syrian refugee who has migrated because of civil war and unrest, as it has been read from the point of view of Africans who have migrated because of the lack of food.⁸ Included in the refugee classes are children who have been separated from their parents during the journey, in effect making them orphans.

Another avenue of exploration is to answer the question that confront refugees who have arrived at their destination, “What now?” In the Book of Ruth, the system of gleaning which existed in an agricultural society was in place. Modern re-readings of the Book of Ruth, would need to address the problem of migrants’ sustenance in modern Western society.

⁸For example, see Madipoane J. Masenya, “‘Ngwetsi’ (Bride): The Naomi-Ruth Story from an African-South African Woman’s Perspective,” *Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion* 14 (1998) 81-90.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbo, Shahal, Simcha Lev-Yadun, and Avi Gopher. "Yield Stability: An Agronomic Perspective on the Origin of Near Eastern Agriculture." *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 19 (2010): 143-50.
- Abbo, Shahal, Dan Shtienberg, Judith Lichtenzveig, Simcha Lev-Yadun, and Avi Gopher. "The Chickpea, Summer Cropping, and a New Model for Pulse Domestication in the Ancient Near East." *Quarterly Review of Biology* 78 (2003): 435-48.
- Afifi, Tamer, Emma Liwenga, and Lukas Kwezi. "Rain-Induced Crop Failure, Food Insecurity, and Out-Migration in Same-Kilimanjaro, Tanzania." *Climate and Development* 6 (2014): 53-60.
- Anthony, David W. "Migration in Archaeology: The Baby and the Bathwater." *American Archaeologist* 92 (1990) 895-914.
- Baker, David L. "To Glean or Not to Glean . . ." *ExpTim* 117 (2006): 406-10.
- Bayless, Charles P. "Naomi in the Book of Ruth in Light of the Mosaic Covenant." *BibSac* 161 (2004): 413-31.
- Beattie, D. R. G. "The Targum of Ruth: Translation with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes." in *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, Vol. 19; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994, 1-34.
- Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994.
- Berman, Joshua. "Ancient Hermeneutics and the Legal Structure of the Book of Ruth." *ZAW* 119 (2007): 22-38.
- Borowski, Oded. *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987.
- _____. *Daily Life in Biblical Times*. SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 5. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.
- Bowbrick, Peter. "The Causes of Famine: A Refutation of Professor Sen's Theory." *Food Policy* 11 (1986): 105-24.
- Bush, Frederic. *Ruth/Esther*. WBC 9. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996.

- Campbell, Edward F. Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB 7; New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1975.
- _____. "Ruth Revisited." In *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes*. Ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999, 57-76.
- Carmichael, Calum M. "A Ceremonial Crux: Removing a Man's Sandal as a Female Gesture of Contempt." *JBL* 96 (1977): 321-36.
- Dalman, Gustaf. *Arbeit und Sitte in Palastina*. 8 vols. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1928-42. Reprint, New York: Georg Olms, 1987.
- _____. *Work and Customs in Palestine*. 2 vols. Trans. Nadia Abdulhadi-Sukhtian. Ramallah: Dar Al Nasher, 2013.
- Dargo, George. "Deriving Law from the Biblical Narrative: the Book of Ruth." *New England Law Review* 40 (2006): 351-60.
- Davies, Susanna. "Are Coping Strategies a Cop Out?" *IDS Bulletin* 24 (1993): 60-72.
- de Cree, Fernand. "History and Archaeology of the Bet Shahur Region," *ZDPV* 115 (1999): 59-84.
- de Waard, J. *Biblia Hebraica Quinta 18 Megilloth: Ruth*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004.
- Delancey, S. "The Mirative and Evidentiality." *Journal for Pragmatics* 33 (2001): 369-82.
- Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn and Tikva Frymer-Kinsky. *Ruth*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011.
- Fewell, Danna Nolan and David Miller Gunn. *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990.
- Green, Barbara Gail. *A Study of Field and Seed Symbolism in the Biblical Story of Ruth*, Ph.D. diss. Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1980.
- Guillaume, Philippe. *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible*. BibleWorld. Sheffield / Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2012.
- Hackett, Jo Ann. "Violence and Women's Lives in the Book of Judges." *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 356-64.

- Hald, Mette Marie *A Thousand Years of Farming: Late Chalcolithic Agricultural Practices at Tell Brak in Northern Mesopotamia*. BAR International Series 1880. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008.
- Harrison, Timothy P. “‘The Land of Medeba’ and Early Iron Age Madaba.” In *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighboring Areas in Honour of Michele Daviau*. ANE Studies Supplement 29. Leuven / Paris / Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2009, 27-45.
- Hendel, Russell J. “Ruth: The Legal Code for the Law of Kindness,” *JBQ* 36 (2008): 254-60.
- Hopkins, David C. *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age*. The Social World of Biblical Antiquity 3. Sheffield: Almond, 1985.
- Hubbard, Robert L. Jr., *The Book of Ruth*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Jenni, Ernst and Claus Westermann. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
- Jouon, Paul. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Trans. T. Muraoka. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005.
- Justice, Oren L. and Louis N. Bass. *Principles and Practices of Seed Storage*. Agriculture Handbook 506. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 1978.
- Kislev, Mordecai E. “*Triticum Parvicoccum* sp. nov., the Oldest Naked Wheat.” *Israel Journal of Botany* 28 (1980): 95-107.
- _____, “Food Remains,” in *Shiloh: The Archaeology of a Biblical Site*. Eds. Israel Finkelstein, Shlomo Bunimovitz, and Zvi Lederman. Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University 10. Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, 1993, 354-61.
- Kislev, Mordecai E., Ehud Weiss, Anat Hartman, and Patty Jo Watson, “Impetus for Sowing and the Beginning of Agriculture: Ground Collecting of Wild Cereals.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 101 (2004) 2692-95.
- Kohler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner, *HALOT*. Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2001.
- Kohlmoos, Melanie. *Ruth: Das Alte Testament Deutsch*. ATD 9, 3. Neubearbeitungen. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009.
- Koosed, Jennifer L. *Gleaning Ruth*. Studies on the Personalities of the Old Testament. Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2011.

- LaCocque, André *Ruth*. A Continental Commentary. Trans. K. C. Hanson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.
- Lambdin, Thomas O. *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*. New York: Scribner, 1971.
- Langgut, Dafna, Israel Finkelstein, and Thomas Litt. "Climate and the Late Bronze Collapse: New Evidence from the Southern Levant." *Tel Aviv* 40 (2013): 149-75.
- Leggett, Donald A. *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth*. Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing, 1974.
- Liebman, Matt and Elizabeth Dyck. "Crop Rotation and Intercropping Strategies for Weed Management." *Ecological Applications* 3 (1993): 92-122.
- Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. 2nd ed.; Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Lücke, Bernhard, Feras Ziadat, and Awni Taimeh, "The Soils of Jordan." In *Atlas of Jordan: History, Territories, and Society*. Ed. Myriam Ababsa; Beirut: Presses de L'Ifpo, 2013.
- Lyons, Diane and A. Catherine D'Andrea. "Griddles, Ovens, and Agricultural Origins: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Bread Baking in Highland Ethiopia." *American Anthropologist* 105 (2003): 515-30.
- Masenya, Madipoane J. "'Ngwetsi' (Bride): The Naomi-Ruth Story from an African-South African Woman's Perspective." *Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion* 14 (1998): 81-90.
- Matthews, Victor H. "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19." *BTB* 22 (1992): 3-11.
- _____. "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4." *BTB*. 21 (1991): 13-21.
- Miller, J. Maxwell "Moab," *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:882-93.
- Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.
- Miller-Naudé, Cynthia L. and C. H. J. van der Merwe. "הנה and Mirativity in Biblical Hebrew," *Hebrew Studies* 52 (2011): 53-81.
- Nielsen, Kirsten. *Ruth: A Commentary*. OTL. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

- Neusner, Jacob. *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Ruth Rabbah and Esther Rabbah I*. Studies in Ancient Judaism 6 Lanham, MD / New York / Oxford: University Press of America, 2001.
- Oden Jr., Robert A. "Taxation in Biblical Israel." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12 (1984): 162-81.
- Perry, Megan, Mahmoud Y. el-Najjar, Michael Finnegan, David S. Reese, and Jennifer Ramsay. "Human, Animal, and Plant Remains," in *Humayma Excavation Project: Nabatean Campground and Necropolis, Byzantine Churches and Early Islamic Domestic Structures*. Eds. John Peter Oleson and Robert Schick. ASOR Archaeological Reports 18 Boston: ASOR, 2013, 321-80.
- Ramsey, J. "Plant Remains." In *Humayma Excavation Project 2: Nabatean Campground and Necropolis, Byzantine Churches, and Early Islamic Domestic Structures*. ASOR Archaeological Reports 18. Boston: ASOR, 2013, 353-60.
- Riehl, Simone. "Climate and Agriculture in the Ancient Near East: a Synthesis of the Archaeobotanical and Stable Carbon Isotope Evidence." *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 17 (2008) S43-S51.
- _____, R. A. Bryson, and K. Pustovoytov. "Changing Growing Conditions for Crops during the Near Eastern Bronze Age (3000-1200 BC): the Stable Carbon Isotope Evidence." *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35 (2008): 1011-22.
- _____. "Variability in Ancient Near Eastern Environmental and Agricultural Development," *Journal of Arid Environments* 86 (2012): 1-9.
- Rosen, Arlene Miller. "The Social Response to Environmental Change in Early Bronze Age Canaan." *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 14 (1999): 26-44.
- Routledge, Bruce. *Intermittent Agriculture and the Political Economy of Iron Age Moab*, Ph.D. diss. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996.
- Sakenfeld, Katherine Doob. *Ruth*. Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999.
- Sasson, Jack M. "Divine Providence or Human Plan?" *Int* 30 (1976): 415-19.
- _____. *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*. The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore / London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.

- Schiffman, Lawrence H. ed. *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*. Hoboken: KTAV, 1997.
- Singer, Itamar. "A Political History of Ugarit." In *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*. Ed. Wilfred G. E. Watson and Nicolas Wyatt. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Siquans, Agnethe. "Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Woman to be Integrated into Israel." *JBL* 128 (2009): 443-52.
- Sneed, Mark. "Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?" *ZAW* 111 (1999): 498-507.
- Thompson, Thomas and Dorothy Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth." *VT* 18 (1968): 79-99.
- University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System. "Broadcast Seeding," *The Cereal Sentinel: A Newsletter for Treasure Valley Cereal Producers* 14 (1997) 7.
- Vaughan-Williams, Alys. *An Interpretation of the Archaeobotanical Remains from Khirbet al-Mudaybi*. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis. Sheffield: Sheffield University, 2000.
- Villenave, Cecile. Tom Bongers, Klemens Ekschmitt, Djibril Djigal, and Jean Luc Chotte. "Changes in Nematode Communities Following Cultivation of Soils after Fallow Periods of Different Length." *Applied Soil Ecology* 17 (2001): 43-52.
- Wainright, G. A. "Meneptah's Aid to the Hittites." *JEA* 46 (1960): 24-28.
- Waltke, Bruce K. and Michael O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Warren-Fothlin, Andy. "Politeness Strategies in Biblical Hebrew and West African Languages," *Journal of Translation* 3 (2007): 55-71.
- Waters, Jaime L. *Threshing Floors in Ancient Israel: Their Ritual and Symbolic Significance*. Emerging Scholars. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.
- Wiese, M. V., W. J. Kaiser, L. J. Smith, F. J. Muehlbauer. *The Ascochyta Blight of the Chickpea*. Agriculture Experimental Station Bulletin 886 rev. Moscow, ID: University of Idaho College of Agriculture, 1995, 1-4.
- Zenger, Erich. *Das Buch Ruth*. Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 8. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992.

Zevit, Ziony. "Dating Ruth: Legal, Linguistic, and Historical Observations," *ZAW* 117 (2005): 574-600.

Zohary, Daniel, Maria Hopf, and Ehud Weiss. *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Domesticated Plants in South-West Asia, Europe, and the Mediterranean Basin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.