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THE BOOK OF RUTH AS INTRA-BIBLICAL CRITIQUE ON THE DEUTERONOMIC LAW

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ABSTRACT

The book of Ruth, written in the post-exilic period, constitutes a 'homily on Dt 23-25' (Michael D Goulder). It is the only biblical example of an entire book systematically subjecting a body of laws from the Deuteronomic code to a socio-critical (Rt 1-2) and sexual-critical (Rt 3-4) relecture through various kinds of allusions. The historical prejudice of the 'community law' against the Moabites, refusing them admission to the 'assembly of Yahweh' (Dt 23:4-7), is disproved (throughout the whole book, especially in Rt 1), by a counter-story aimed at promoting sympathy (against Neh 13:1-3). Through the reinterpretation of the prohibition of incest, the brother-in-law marriage is defended against all suspicions (Rt 3). At the same time, it corrects the accusation of incest, which also lingers about the image of the Moabites (Gn 19:30-38). On the other hand, the narrative about the execution of the right to gleaning (Rt 2) and the right to the Levirate marriage (Rt 4) intensifies the demands of the Deuteronomic code (Dt 24:19 or 25:5-10). The Ruth novelette turns the Law of Deuteronomy into 'narrative ethics' (Reinhold Bohlen). The driving force for its meta-legal stance and critique, but also for its objective, lies in the portrayal of the 'loving-kindness, love' (chesed) of Yahweh and in calling forth the 'loving-kindness' of his people through the narrated praxis of the stranger Ruth.

In 1993 *Michael D Goulder* wrote an article in which he interpreted the book of Ruth as a 'homily on Deuteronomy 23-25'. As 'homily' Ruth assumes that Deuteronomy had been so well known at that time that one could understand Ruth as its narrative interpretation. According to Dt 31:10-13, the Deuteronomic Torah had to be read aloud at the feast of Tabernacles every seventh year at the Jerusalem sanctuary, before all Israel. Neh 13:1-3 relates that it was read *'to the people from the book of Moses'* the so-called community law from Dt 23, *'the passage that reads, "Ammonites and Moabites are never allowed to enter the community of God, because they once had not met the Israelites with bread and water..." (23:4-5) When they had heard this law, they separated out*

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from Israel all mixed nations.' Later we shall have to return to this text. Ruth as 'homily' — this also means that the book is a sermon closely oriented to the Bible text. According to Goulder, the plot of the book of Ruth was spun out of the laws of Deuteronomy 23 to 25. The preacher might be commenting upon them with his account, in parts even phrase by phrase. This may be proved by the numerous common formulations. Yet, the law represented in the book of Ruth often stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the Deuteronomic law. The cause of this may in most cases be that the Deuteronomic laws may already have become outdated and also have no longer been understood by the time that the book of Ruth was written. Ruth nevertheless might apply them for its 'story', to give an archaic flair to the narrated history. In my opinion, with such an explanation Goulder barely does justice to a further, yet a third aspect of 'homily', namely its effort to bring the older texts, endowed with high authority, into a dialogue with the concerns of its own present.

No matter how one may think about the book of Ruth as a 'homily' on Deuteronomy, it is in any case a matter of intertextuality. Intertextuality presupposes 'informed readers' that have certain foreknowledge at their disposal — in our case of the Deuteronomic law — so that allusions can be recognised and their potentiality of meaning can be exhausted. If Deuteronomy had at the time already been a canonical text, then from the beginning onwards, one will have to reckon with the fact that it has been relatively widely present in the cultural memory. Therefore, especially in canonical texts, intertextual references must not just be marked once specifically, but mere repetitions of individual elements of the pre-text (thus, of Deuteronomy) that is being alluded to in the intertext (that is, in the book of Ruth) are already significant. Of course, differences can nevertheless exist between the formulation of an allusion and the formulation of its text of reference. They possibly even reinterpret the text of reference (namely Deuteronomy) and aim towards a change of consciousness and practice.

But enough of theory. The thesis of the above-quoted article that is really determinative for the history of research, to me seems to lie therein, that it does not only bring one or the other passage of the book of Ruth into connection with a Deuteronomic law, but that it

does so with each of its four chapters, and furthermore, that the laws which are referred to, follow each other over a relatively short stretch within the Deuteronomic code, namely within Dt 23-25. These chapters belong to the youngest and the strictly juridical part of the Deuteronomic code, to the block of chapters 19-25. The intensity of the allusions in the book of Ruth nevertheless differs from law to law. According to Goulder it reaches from mere thematic contrast, to numerous verbal correspondences. I wish to proceed from this observation with my reading of the book of Ruth.

I work from the assumption that the book of Ruth was not written in the mid-monarchical time, but only in the post-exilic time, and that the course of dependency therefore runs from Deuteronomy to Ruth. Its place within the massoretic canon, for example, later also argues in favour of this. 'Canon' here serves as a catchword: Within the canon the book of Ruth is named after a Moabitess, a member of a people who had predominantly negative connotations within Israel, and a woman, too! Going out from this striking fact, I shall outline

(1) to what extent the topic of 'Moab / Moabite(ss)' is foregrounded by the book of Ruth itself. Within common exegesis this usually does not sufficiently come to light, but it is of importance for our subject. Subsequent to that I shall discuss

(2) the connections of the individual chapters of the book of Ruth with Deuteronomy. From this intertextuality I draw some

(3) conclusions with regard to the intention of the book of Ruth.

What seems to look like a rather dull literary analysis, contains socio-political explosives in the context of biblical texts of reference. In my article I confine myself to Deuteronomy as the pre-text being decisive for the book of Ruth, though Ruth also refers, for example, to the narratives of Genesis on Israel's archparents, to the Manna narrative in Exodus 16, and to the 'kinsman-redeeming'-legislation in Leviticus 25. These references are of secondary importance, but they show that Ruth probably already presupposes the entire Torah as canonical entity. Then, the peculiarity in Ruth's narrative debate with the Deuteronomic law that participates in the canonicity of the Torah, lies in the fact that the individual marginal story of Ruth

itself with its critique of 'canonical' standards, has later been included into the canon, that is, it has been adopted intra-Biblically, and gives us an insight into the canonical process, into the development of the Old Testament canon.

1. MOAB, BETHLEHEM AND RUTH THE MOABITESS

The book of Ruth begins like a 'normal' family story. A man leaves Bethlehem together with his family and finds refuge in Moab, the granary nearest to Judah, as a 'person seeking economic asylum'.

> *'In the days when the judges ruled, a famine came over the land. Then, a man together with his wife and his two sons, moved away from Bethlehem in Judah to settle down in the meadowland (verbatim, 'in the fields') of Moab as stranger. The man's name was Elimelech. His wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They came into the meadowland of Moab ...'* (Rt 1:1-2)

Immediately at the beginning the decisive cues are uttered — 'Bethlehem' and 'Moab'. Bethlehem namely connects the scenes of the four chapters, which at the same time match the four acts into which the events are subdivided. But with Moab, one theme, possibly *the* theme of the book of Ruth, comes into sight: Ruth the Moabitess is incorporated into Judah, a Moabite woman becomes the progenitrix of David in Bethlehem. Thus, Bethlehem and Moab are repeated in verse 1 and verse 2. According to Martin Buber (1954) the repetition of words is, in quite general terms, 'perhaps in general the most effective of all ways to make known a character of meaning without presenting it'. And in fact, in the book of Ruth they are exceedingly important. Not only do they achieve ornamental coherence, but they are also used as structural signals and decisively emphasize the intention of a statement. This will presently become even clearer. The repetition of 'Bethlehem' — stated more precisely by 'in Judah' only here in verses 1 and 2 — and of 'Moab' — more accurately, 'the fields of Moab' — is thus quite programmatic. In verses 1 and 2 both place names in a way frame the man, his wife and his two sons as well as the rhetorically broad introduction of their names that follows.

Rt	1:1	A + B	מבית לחם יהודה . . . בשדי מואב
		Z	הוא ואשתו ושני בניו
	2	Z	שם האיש . . . ושם אשתו . . . ושם שני־בניו . . .
		A + B	אפרתים מבית לחם יהודה . . . שדי־מואב

Beyond this exposition, שדי מואב and ביח לחם joined with מואביה, are systematized in the course of the text in chapters 1, 2 and 4, according to certain schemata.

Rt	1:1	A + B	מבית לחם . . . משדי מואב
	2	A + B	מבית לחם . . . שדי מואב
	4	C	נשים מאביות
	6	B + B	משדי מואב . . . בשדה מואב
	19	A + A	בית לחם . . . בית לחם
	22	C	רות המואביה
		B + A	משדי מואב . . . בית לחם
	2:2	C	רות המואביה
	4	A	מבית לחם
	6	C	נערה מואביה
		B	משדה מואב
	21	C	רות המואביה
	4:3	B	משדה מואב
	5	C	רות המואביה
	10	C	רות המאביה
	11	A	בבית לחם

As the capital letters indicate, 'Bethlehem', the 'fields of Moab' and the 'Moabitess' follow one another in each chapter in a certain regular pattern. Here I confine myself to this formal aspect, although one could also prove that the positions of the indications of place and origin are relevant to the message within the structure of the narrative. As I have shown, the instances in 1:2 are only an exception.

To wit, the three terms are emphasized additionally by a further stylistic device: 'Bethlehem', the 'fields of Moab' and the 'Moabitess(es)' are used for a total of seven times within the book. Such groups of seven are also characteristic of Deuteronomy, and there one encounters them in different forms and functions. Notably keywords and key expressions often appear seven times or in multiples of seven, and thus they emphasize a statement, move it towards the centre or the end of a sentence, or elucidate it by means of cross-connections. Viewed in itself, the sequence of elements running sevenfold through a text is frequently constructed in an elaborate way. The book of Ruth may be inspired by this stylistic technique which is typical of Deuteronomy. At any rate, it likewise fits central words and other words together to make groups of seven, which span either the entire book or some of its four narrative units. Perhaps even the book itself gives a genrle clue at its end by having the women of Bethlehem say that Ruth is worth more '*than seven sons*', and by having Obed, her and Boaz's son, stand in the seventh place in the concluding genealogy. Be that as it may, one can in any event state: Beside מואב, which is emphasized as geographic and ethnic term by the seven instances of the use of שדה/שדי מואב 'the fields' or 'the territory of Moab' and מואביה 'Moabitess', שדה 'field' forms a separate group of seven as an individual word as well. This group is restricted to the fields around Bethlehem, the main scene of the second narrative unit, that is, the second chapter (2:2, 3[2x], 8, 9, 17, 22). Similarly, beside the seven occurrences of בית לחם, בית 'house', too, is used another seven times as description of various family relationships (1:8, 9; 2:7; 4:11 [2x], 12, 13). Apart from the five instances where it is connected with המואביה 'the Moabitess' (cf our diagram), the name Ruth also appears specifically another seven times (1:4, 14, 16; 2:8, 22; 3:9; 4:13). The expression נערה מואביה, the 'Moabite girl' appears in 2:6 in the centre of a palindromic structure and is synonymous with רות המואביה 'Ruth the Moabitess' of the outer parts of the structure in 2:2 and 2:21 (again refer our diagram). Thus, 'the Moabite girl' is at the same time integrated into another group of seven being formed by נערה/נערות 'girl(s)' (for Ruth and the maids of Boaz). I could continue in this way, enumerating the many things that are characterized by a group of seven or by a

multiple of seven references in Ruth! Their number by far exceeds the frequency of repetitions of other groups, for instance, of groups of five occurrences of the same expressions that are also important in a certain way. From the groups of seven, one can draw conclusions concerning the intention of the book. With a string of different expressions, which are used seven times, they emphasize three topics: firstly and above all, the admission of Ruth the Moabitess to the people's and God's society, Israel; secondly, the social behaviour towards her while gleaning on the fields of Bethlehem; and thirdly, the Levirate Marriage into which Boaz enters with her. 'Brother-in-law'- or 'Levirate Marriage' means that a widow is married by her brother-in-law or by another relative of her deceased husband. This dissimilarity however already mirrors the difference between Deuteronomy and the book of Ruth. As I will show below, these themes especially also display connections with the Deuteronomic law with respect to phrasing and meaning.

2. RUTH AND THE DEUTERONOMIC CODE

The theme of 'Moab', from the first verse systematically running through the book of Ruth in the form of groups of seven, is reminiscent of relevant traditions about Moabites and Moabitesses. Israel's relations to Moab were ambivalent: they were partly characterised polemically (for instance by the Torah in Nm 25, by the books of the Prophets in Is 15-16; Jr 48; Ezk 25; Zph 2:8-11), and partly by relationship and closeness (for instance Dt 2:9, and especially Dt 2:28-29 according to which the Moabites have sold grain and drinking water to Israel that passed through their territory). The Moabites seemed to be the 'close strangers' from whom one had to distinctly segregate oneself. This was really dramatically carried out in the so-called 'community law' (Dt 23:2-9) by the exclusion of the Moabites. The disapproval of especially the Moabitesses was already clearly shown in the descent of the Moabites from the incest of Lot and his older daughter, according to the family story of Gn 19:30-38. The book of Ruth constitutes a 'counter story' to both texts — as Jürgen Ebach (1995) last has described in detail. I would like to state this thesis more precisely: Rt 1 and 2 need to be read against the background of the Deuteronomic paragraph on the

Moabites and in opposition to its norm as well as to the foundation of this norm. Rt 3 and 4 are to be read as correction of the image of the Moabitesses drawn in Gn 19. The incest of Moab's progenitrix, which is narrated in Gn 19, is also contrasted by allusions to Deuteronomic laws.

2.1 A 'counter story' to the 'community law' (Dt 23:4-7)

Within the legal system of the Deuteronomic code, the community law of Dt 23:2-9 belongs to the corpus of sexual laws which comments on the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. It closely follows the prohibition against incest in 23:1. Regulations for 'keeping clean' the people follow this care for the sexual purity of the family. In addition to this, 23:2-9 determines the relation between the descent of what was experienced as 'strange', and the integration into the 'assembly of Yahweh', קהל יהוה. The apodictic prohibitions that have been collected in this community law are perhaps ordered in a kind of historical retrospect. They look further and further back into the past by walking down the line of nations with whom Israel has dealt during its history; at the conquest of the land this is the Canaanites. Dt 23:2-3 probably opposes alienating cultic-sexual practices of the inhabitants of the land and the sacralisation of sexuality. Behind verses 4-7 that follow, lies the period of Israel's desert wandering with its negative experiences concerning Ammonites and Moabites. This regulation reads:

> *'No Ammonite or Moabite may be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh, even in the tenth generation. Their descendants are not to be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh, for they did not go to meet you with bread and water on the way when you moved out of Egypt, and Moab has hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Mesopotamia and sent him out against you to curse you — but Yahweh your God refused to hear Balaam, and Yahweh your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because Yahweh your God loves you. Never ever try to get a treaty of peace or friendship with them!'*

Presumably, at first the Ammonites and Moabites were not admitted to the assembly of Yahweh due to their origin from an incestuous union — the one about which Gn 19:30-38 narrates. But this association remains unexpressed and the apodictic prohibition therefore unfounded. Only the second 'never' of the admission of both nations argues historically-ethically. Because of their inhuman

behaviour, finally even any socio-political relation is denied them, and an anathema is pronounced in the terminology of a treaty. A totally different conduct is intended in the case of the Edomites and Egyptians in verses 8-9. In their case, the fraternal relationship or the sojournership in Egypt conquers the shadows of the past. Thus the Edomites and the Egyptians must not be avoided as 'abomination', that is, they must not be despised and be socially downgraded when settling in Israel. Their great-grandchildren are admitted to the assembly of Yahweh.

What then, is the relation of the Ruth-narrative to the regulation of Dt 23:4-7? Originally the exclusion concerns the Moabites, and specifically their men. This also reveals the context of the law. Rabbinical exegesis has referred to this difference and thus avoided a contradiction between Ruth and the community law. But several Rabbinical texts interpret the community law in such a way that it also implies the prohibition of mixed marriages. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show how the paragraph on the Ammonites and Moabites has already been interpreted intra-Biblically soon after Deuteronomy. At the beginning I have already mentioned Neh 13:1-3. These verses report that Dt 23:4-6 was read aloud in the assembly of the people and that thereupon all the people of mixed descent were removed. Strictly speaking, Neh 13:1-3 paraphrases the Deuteronomic community law, abridges it slightly and amends it. Said in concrete terms, the 'assembly of Yahweh', קהל יהוה, is being identified with post-Exilic Judah, from which everyone of foreign descent was removed. The material cited by Neh 13:1-3 from the Deuteronomic community law, is being elucidated and extended by Neh 13:23-27, by reverting to Dt 7:3. See the following section of Neh 13:23-27:

> *'In those days I also saw Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab ... I beseeched them in God's name: You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves!'*

This phrasing is taken nearly verbatim from Dt 7:3. Continuing with the text, we read:

> *'Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel*

sinned? ... And now one hears about you that you are committing the same atrocity and that you are unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women.'

In Ezra 9:1-2, by the way, we read something similar, with allusions to Dt 7:1-4 and Dt 23:3-4, and further, within Ezra's prayer of repentance in 9:12, containing a reference sharing the earlier formulations of Dt 7:3 and 23:7. The cleansing of the people by divorcing from or expelling the foreign women as decreed by Ezra and Nehemiah, seemingly presents the marriage with foreigners, among whom the Moabites/Moabitesses are explicitly mentioned several times (Ezra 9:1; 10:2; Neh 13:1,23), as *the* misdemeanour, since the identity of the community as people of Yahweh is at issue. The way in which foreign women have to be treated, is drawn both from Israel's history and from the obligation of the Torah. Although the book of Ruth does not need to presuppose these texts in Ezra and Nehemiah, Ruth's story opposes the understanding of the Deuteronomic paragraphs on the Moabites, as reflected by Ezra and Nehemiah, as it does the alternatives to these paragraphs.

The story of the book of Ruth contrasts the differences between Israelites and Moabites found in Dt 23:4-6 step by step, by inverting the reproaches of the historical-ethical foundation of the community law in the behaviour of the Moabites as well as in the behaviour of Ruth and Boaz. Moreover, Yahweh's acting for his people and for foreigners is also realised in Ruth's and Boaz's actions. Yet, when the foundation of the prohibition of the admission ceases to apply, the prohibition itself cannot further be warranted either. The Ruth-novella promotes this.

A close-up view reveals the following — *Dt 23:5a* states: The Moabites have refused Israel the right of hospitality while wandering through the desert, and did not go to meet it with bread and water. The book of Ruth takes a stand against this, especially in the first and second chapters. Ruth 1 narrates that Moab has granted hospitality to Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons, famine refugees from Bethlehem, the 'house of bread'. Moab provides the Israelite 'foreigners' (Rt 1:1 uses the verb גור) with food. The two sons Mahlon and Kilion even marry Moabitesses. As soon as Naomi and Ruth are in Bethlehem, the Moabitess is gleaning in the field of Boaz to feed herself and her mother-in-law. She not only 'gives' Naomi from that

which she had gathered, but also from that which she had left over from the meal that had been offered her (2:18). Thus, she sustains an Israelite by means of her bread even in Bethlehem. Thereby is fulfilled for Naomi the Judean via Ruth the Moabitess *'that Yahweh has looked after his people and given them bread'* (1:6). However, Yahweh not only acts towards Naomi through Ruth, but also towards Ruth through Boaz. Like Yahweh had satisfied the thirst and hunger of his people, Boaz permits Ruth to drink from the water-jars of his servants and maids in the field (2:9) and invites her for bread and roasted corn (2:14).

The second reproach — *Dt 23:5b-6*: Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel, but Yahweh turned the curse into a blessing, because he 'loves' Israel. Against that, the book of Ruth says that Ruth the Moabitess *'has sheltered herself under Yahweh's wings'* (2:12). Therefore, Yahweh will bless her (cf 3:10). On the other hand, at the end of the book Naomi the Bethlehemite experiences Yahweh's blessing and his love through Ruth her Moabite daughter-in-law who 'loves' her (4:15) and — expressing the blessing — *'has born'* her *'a son'* (4:17).

2.1.1 Rt 1 — the exodus from Egypt and the Deuteronomic law

The counter story to the paragraph on the Moabites of the Deuteronomic community law already starts with the first verses of the book of Ruth, the background to the actual story. It has its main focus in the first chapter, in the narrative about the return of Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. I have already traced its most important features. There, the only phraseological bridge between these two texts, is the term מואבי or מואביה. Therefore, I now want to supplement another two phrasings that they have in common. The 'thesis of opposition', namely, paints Naomi's sojournership in Moab and her return to Bethlehem in the colours of the sojourn in Egypt and of the Exodus. This is also partly achieved by literal allusions to Deuteronomy in Ruth 1. At the same time, they intensify the contrast to the community law.

The Exodus Tradition is already evoked through the phrase פקד יהוה אתעמו *'Yahweh has visited his people'* with which Rt 1:6 refers to Gn 50:24-25 and Ex 3:16; 4:31. In Gn 50:24 Joseph says to his brothers in Egypt, *'God will surely look after you and lead you up out of*

this land {namely, Egypt} ...' In Ruth 1:7 Naomi then 'sets out' (ותצא), her two Moabite daughters-in-law join her exodus, *'they got going to return into the land of Judah'* (ותלכנה בדרך לשוב אל־ארץ יהודה). The departure from Egypt as the model for Naomi's homecoming at the same time forms the link to the paragraph on the Moabites. To forge this link, Dt 23:5 uses the phrase *'on the way of your departure from Egypt'* (בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים). These correspondences can only be associated with each other if the Deuteronomic community law has previously already been discerned as the most important pre-text of Rt 1 because of the role of Moab and the Moabitesses. The expression בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים, however, is not just some phrasing of the Exodus. Appearing in sequence to Dt 23:5 in the paragraph on the Moabites, it is namely repeated again in 24:9 and 25:7, and editorially it structures Dt 23-25, that is, those chapters of Deuteronomy, the laws of which the book of Ruth is referring to.

Naomi's exodus leads to Berhlehem. There, she replies to the women that recognize her, *'Why do you call me Naomi {that is, the lovely one}, as Yahweh has humiliated me, and Shaddai has treated me badly?'* (Rt 1:21). The background to this probably is an allusion to Israel's small historical creed (Dt 26:5-9). There we read about the Israelites in Egypt: *'The Egyptians treated us badly, humiliated us and imposed hard labour on us'* (Dt 26:6). ענה II pi'el 'to humiliate' (so GSV) and רעע 'to do evil' are connecred with each other only in the two verses mentioned. Modern translations, however, sometimes read ענה I qal as 'to give evidence against'. A discussion on ענה is superfluous, though, as such a distinction of homonym roots can only be made in the course of the development of a Hebrew grammar following the Arabic grammar. Thus, Naomi's lamentation in Rt 1:21 presumably alludes to Israel's suppression by the Egyptians with the well-known formulation of the creed. Ruth 2 will change Naomi's embitterment, for this chapter reveals the way in which Rt 1:6 has produced the exodus — *'that Yahweh has given his people bread'*. Deuteronomy probably once again lies behind this sentence, specifically the principle of Dt 10:18 according to which Yahweh loves the foreigners *'and gives them bread and clothing'*.

2.1.2 Rt 2 and the gleanings law, Dt 24:19

As I have already mentioned, the second chapter too — that is, the scene in the field of Boaz, in which the harvest is being done and Ruth is gleaning — criticizes the community law, albeit not directly, but indirectly. Primarily, Rt 2 is a socio-critical reinterpretation of the gleanings law, Dt 24:19. This verse says about gleanings:

> *'When you are harvesting in your field and you leave behind a sheaf in the field, you shall not turn back to get it. They are to be for the foreigner, the orphan and the widow, so that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.'*

This law is converted into narrative paraenesis by Rt 2 and, at the same time, far outdone in its social welfare. Analogous regulations can also be found in Lv 19:9; 23:22. They prohibit gleanings in favour of the poor and the foreigners as follows:

> *'When you gather in the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field. You shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest... You shall leave them for the poor and the foreigners.'*

Like Rt 2, Lv even uses the verb לקט 'to gather' to express the gleaning. Nevertheless, the literary connection between Rt 2 and the Deuteronomic code is more reasonable, for only Dt 24:19 speaks of the 'sheaf', עמר, in the context of the harvest, like Rt 2:7, 15 does. Rt 2 employs the verb לקט for the gathering of the ears in allusion to Ex 16, where לקט describes the collecting of the Manna, and where the verb is used the most frequently after Rt 2 in the Bible. This implies the following: The ears that are picked up by the Moabitess become the Manna of her exodus, of which she gives Naomi her mother-in-law (Rt 2:18).

The scene of the second chapter starts at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22) and concludes with the end of the barley and wheat harvest (2:23). Although Ruth is a foreigner and a widow, she obviously cannot naturally make use of the right to glean the ears. When she wants to glean *'behind the one in whose eyes I find favour'* (2:2), then this probably implies more than a realistic assessment of the social practice which often was little worried about the ethos of solidarity. Though according to Dt 24:19, 'foreigners, orphans and widows' were entitled to gleaning, this triad probably means those

members of the village community that did not possess any land. Also, the 'foreigner' (גר) belongs to the social spectrum of Jewish population. The social critique of the book of Ruth starts at this point. Ruth gathers ears — literally — '*among the sheaves behind the harvesting ones*' (Rt 2:7). In the field of Boaz '*where they are harvesting*' (2:7), she not only receives 'the sheaves left behind', as Deuteronomy provides for, but Boaz also grants her hospitality, invites her to a meal and instructs his servants to let her 'glean among the sheaves' and even to leave some ears from the harvest for her (2:15-16). Thus, as it were, instead of the gleanings Ruth is given a share in the harvest. Therefore, the yield is unexpectedly bountiful. For this deed, Naomi wishes Yahweh's blessing upon Boaz (2:20) as the Deuteronomic law promises it for the one who acts in a socially positive manner (Dt 24:19).

2.2 A correction of the image of the Moabitesses (Gn 19:30-38)

2.2.1 Rt 3 and the prohibition against incest, Dt 23:1

The third chapter of Ruth, the scene of the night encounter between Ruth and Boaz on the threshing-floor of Boaz, is directed at Ruth's 'kinsman-redemption'. It uses allusions to the prohibition of incest in Dt 23:1, which directly precedes the community law. The reason for this unexpected aspect, namely that Rt 3 refers back to the prohibition of incest may have been discussions in which the brother-in-law marriage was considered an act of sexual offence, so that Lv 18:16 and 20:21 may possibly even oppose it directly. Be that as it may, Rt 4 will further follow this line with the Levirate marriage of Boaz and Ruth. The third chapter, however, above all tries to set Ruth's behaviour off against the behaviour of Lot's older daughter and the progenitrix of the Moabites, as narrated in Gn 19:30-33, as a clear moral advance.

Dt 23:1 prohibits to marry one's father's wife and to 'uncover' (גלה pi'el) his bed, literally 'the coat / the (hem of a) garment' (כנף), which also means, to enter into marriage with her. The book of Ruth, however, interprets this parallelism as two actions following each other — firstly, as 'uncovering the coat' (cf Dt 23:1b) and secondly, as 'marrying' (cf Dt 23:1a). By that it clarifies that 'uncovering the

coat' under certain circumstances may be the right preparation for marriage. To achieve this meaning, the narrator severs the combination of the words, which only occurs in Dt 23:1b (and in the Shechemite Dodecalogue, 27:20), into its two elements, כנף 'coat' and גלה pi'el 'to uncover', and afterwards combines them into the phrases מרגלות (pi'el) גלה 'to uncover the legs' (Rt 3:4, 7, encountered nowhere else in the Bible) and פרש כנף 'to spread the coat / the garment / the hem of a garment' (3:9, otherwise only in Ezk 16:8).

In 2:12 the night scene is already prepared literarily via the cue כנף 'coat' and accentuated theologically. In this verse כנף is used in the dual, thus having the meaning 'wings'. Boaz wishes Ruth the blessing of Yahweh, *'the God of Israel, to whom you have come to shelter yourself under his wings'*. Therefore, in 3:9 Ruth asks Boaz to comply now with his prayer through acting. 'Boaz's blessing becomes true, if he makes it a reality. God's wings manifest themselves in the "wing" of Boaz. Thus, the quotation of the "wings" is also an indication to the theology (in the narrower sense of the word) of the book of Ruth.' (Jürgen Ebach 1995). Rt 2:12 and 3:9 allude to Ezk 16:8, where Yahweh spreads his 'coat' (כנף) over the naked woman Jerusalem at the time of love. This intertextuality interprets the relationship between Boaz and Ruth the Moabitess according to the model of the narrative of Israel's chosenness — or of the early days of Jerusalem when Yahweh has married her to himself — probably under the reign of David. Although the aspect of matrimony is foregrounded in 3:9, in 'uncovering the coat / the hem of the garment' (פרש כנף), the phrase also has the connotation of human and religious protective companionship (cf Rt 2:12 and Ps 91:4). By the way, the suggestive atmosphere of the night scene is absolutely intentional within the narrative, for the language of chapter 3 is full of erotic-sexual imagery. Like being dressed for marriage, Ruth goes to the threshing-floor of Boaz, uncovers the place at his feet there and lies down. When Boaz awakes in the middle of the night, she asks him to spread over her the hem of his garment, that is, to enter into marriage, which at the same time will fulfil the function of 'kinsman-redeeming' (גאל):

> *'Spread the hem of your garment'* — so k^{e}tib, or q^{e}re: *'spread your wings'* — *'over your maid, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.'*

2.2.2 Rt 4 and brother-in-law marriage, Dt 25:5-10

The legal transactions of Levirate marriage and purchase of a field by the 'kinsman-redeemer', which are treated in the form of a narrative in Ruth chapter 4, are usually not connected with each other in the Old Testament. Nowadays, however, they are attested as legal act of one and the same ancient institution, namely of the *'ge'ullâh* marriage', the 'kinsman-redemption marriage', by a Phoenician text dating from the seventh century B C, which was found in Southern Turkey and may have parallels in the Hittite tradition (Lemaire1989). Thus, their narrative connection need not be an original reinterpretation of the ethos of family solidarity by the book of Ruth.

The points of contact in word and motif, between Dt 25:5-10 and Rt 4 are clear. The legal regulations are judged by the exegerical literature as either just apparently contradictory, or irrelevant or incompatible. My thesis is that the practice of Rt 4 expands the obligations of the Deuteronomic law and, with that, surpasses its social demands. Thus, it pleads that 'justice does not in the end amount to nothing more than legality' (Jan Christian Gertz 1994). This intention coincides with the tendency already visible in chapter 2. In dealing with Ruth, the widowed Moabitess within the sphere of the community law in Dt 23:4, chapter 4 however is directed at the problem of mixed marriages with foreign women. Let us quickly work through the most important points of contact between Rt 4 and the law on brother-in-law marriage in Dt 25:5-10.

Rt 4:1-2 formulates the assembling of the court of elders in allusion to Dt 25:7 and, with this, already indicates the connection with the law on brother-in-law marriage:

> *'Boaz had gone up to the gate.'*

There, he invites the kinsman-redeemer 'So-and-so' who was just passing, to take a seat beside him.

> *'Then Boaz fetched ten men of the elders of the town.'*

They join them. The kinsman-redeemer agrees to buy Naomi's field. Thereupon Boaz obliges the kinsman-redeemer in a second

course of the speech, 'to purchase' Ruth, the widow of Elimelech's son 'together' with his field. Rt 4:5 reads:

> *'At the very moment you buy the field from Naomi, you have to purchase with it at the same time Ruth the Moabitess, the dead man's widow, in order to continue the name of the deceased on his family property.'*

This phrasing is entirely unusual for describing the acquisition of a woman. It aims at closely linking the two legal acts concerning land law and marriage phraseologically too, by using the same verb קנה 'to purchase, to buy' in verses 5 and 8-10. Decisive above all, however, is the fact that verse 5 expands the brother-in-law marriage of Dt 25:5 beyond the circle of blood-brothers into the Levirate marriage which also includes the nearest relatives and correspondingly changes the right to undivided inheritance.

The kinsman-redeemer rejects this commitment. In *Rt 4:8* he attests definitively and in public that he cedes his rights by taking off his shoe. This legally binding act is already explained in *4:7*: '*in earlier times*', when documents were not yet used, one legalized sales or barters in this way. The commentary obviously wants to exclude an interpretation in the light of Dt 25:9, where the widow takes off her shoe and the brother-in-law, the brother of the deceased, loses the right to her. Thus, similar gestures have diametrically opposed functions: in the book of Ruth the abandonment of a right is indicated, in Deuteronomy the refusal of a duty or the revocation of a right. In both cases the 'taking off' is also expressed by two different verbs: Rt 4:7 speaks of שלף, Dt 25:9 of חלץ. Moreover, in the first case the man who relinquishes the legal act despite the legal entitlement, takes off his shoe; in the second case the widow takes off the shoe of the man who refuses the brother-in-law marriage.

Rt 4:10 intensifies the demand to the 'kinsman-redeemer' in verse 5. Boas has testified to himself that he has acquired Ruth '*as wife*', in order that the name of the deceased — that is, the legal title — continues to live '*on his family property*' and '*will not be eradicated from among his brothers and from the gates of his place*'. This explanation fits the short formulation of Dt 25:6, but remains in the setting of clan and town compared with the Deuteronomic perspective on Israel. This will only change in the following verses.

In *Rt 4:11* the congratulating crowd wishes Boaz that Yahweh may be with Ruth the foreigner, like he was with the progenitrices Rachel and Lea '*who together built up the house of Israel*' (בנה אתהיה ישראל). The expression has the connotation of founding a dynasty — especially in the context of David's genealogy in 4:18-22, which is connected with it and is probably secondary. However, the point of view now goes far beyond the refusal 'to build a house for the brother', as apostrophized in Dt 25:9.

The 'kinsman-redemption' that was announced in Rt 4:10, is now carried out in Rt 4:13 and is fulfilled in the birth of a son. The phrasings correspond to Dt 25:5, 6:

> *'Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, he went in to her, and Yahweh gave her the ability to conceive, so that she gave birth to a son.'*

The women's praise of Yahweh for the sake of Naomi in *Rt 4:14*, in a way cites Dt 25:10. However, they turn the disgrace with which the law threatens the refusing brother-in-law by 'calling out his name in Israel' (שם בישראל niph. קרא), to fame with the same formula, for in future Boaz's name shall be praised in Israel.

3. RUTH AS SOCIO- AND SEXUAL-CRITICAL 'RELECTURE'

To summarize: According to my knowledge, Ruth is the only Biblical example of an *entire* book systematically subjecting regulations of the Deuteronomic code to a socio-critical (Rt 1-2) and sexual-critical (Rt 3-4) *relecture* by allusions of different kinds. The historical prejudice against the Moabites by refusing them admission to the 'assembly of Yahweh', is being disproved by a counter story which promotes sympathy (throughout the whole book, especially in Rt 1). Through the reinterpretation of the prohibition of incest, the brother-in-law marriage is defended against all suspicions (Rt 3). At the same time, it impressively contradicts the historical accusation of incest, which lingers about the image of the Moabites in the eyes of Israel, by means of the Moabite progenitrix in the genealogy of David. On the other hand, the narrative about the execution of the right to gleaning (Rt 2) and the right to Levirate marriage (Rt 4) intensifies the demands of the Deuteronomic code and provides it

with details not yet mentioned in it. All in all, the book of Ruth changes the Law of Deuteronomy into 'narrative ethics' (Reinhold Bohlen 1992). Analogous to Deuteronomy, it is being encoded back into Israel's early days — however, the days after Moses — and is supplied with corresponding significance as pre-history of David. Incidentally, if the literary dependence of the book of Ruth on the book of Deuteronomy thus runs the other way round as was assumed until now, it would imply that the social and family legislation of Deuteronomy would downgrade the matters of concern of the book of Ruth sexual-ethically and restrict them regarding the field of social welfare. Such a tendency, however, would contrast sharply with the intention of the Deuteronomic law as it usually reveals itself.

In the book of Ruth, Deuteronomy appears as valid legislation and enjoys high authority. Because the book of Ruth presupposes pre-texts from all books of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy probably already participated in the canonicity of the Pentateuch at the time. However, it was not 'canonical' in the sense that it would no longer be open for discussion, and that one could only refer to it by commenting it. The respect for the legal authority of the Deuteronomic code does not prevent the novel of Ruth from developing the positive effects of its ethics in chapters 2 and 4, and correcting the negative ones in chapters 1 and 3 through narrated practice.

Reinhold Bohlen (1992) has proved that the 'driving force' for the 'meta-legal attitude' of the book of Ruth lies in חסד, in 'loving-kindness, love': 'In the constant, expansive attitude of חסד displayed by the Moabitess Ruth and in the resourceful deeds of חסד of the Bethlehemite Boaz thus evoked by Ruth's attitude, God's חסד for the living and the dead of Elimelech's family, effects itself.' To this I wish to add: The critique that the book of Ruth applies to the Deuteronomic law in a narrative way, in the end aims at showing the loving-kindness of Yahweh and the kindness demanded of his people.[2]

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