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The Purpose of the Book of Ruth

Abstract: Numerous scholars argue that the book of Ruth, with its story concerning mixed marriages of Judahites with Moabite women, consciously opposes the exclusivist rhetoric of the books of Ezra–Nehemiah. However, a detailed analysis of the narrative rhetoric of the book of Ruth, especially compared to the supersessive rhetoric of the roughly contemporary books of Samuel–Kings, reveals that the main purpose of the book of Ruth was to delegitimize the claims of the tribe of Ephraim to domination in Israel, and against this background to promote the tribe of Judah with its Davidic dynasty. Therefore, the book of Ruth most probably served as a rhetorical-ideological model for the much more elaborate, likewise consciously Judean narrative of the books of Samuel–Kings.

Keywords: book of Ruth, books of Samuel–Kings, Israel, Samaria, Ephraim, Judea

The book of Ruth is one of the shortest books of the Hebrew Bible. Its length is comparable with that of the books of Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, or Malachi. Whereas the latter books contain prophetic oracles and should therefore be interpreted in terms of prophecy, the book of Ruth contains a short story and should therefore be interpreted as a narrative.¹ In this respect, it resembles the book of Jonah, which has a relatively clear message: Yahweh does not care for the Israelites only, he is also interested in the fate of other people.² Should the book of Ruth be interpreted in similar terms? Does it consciously broaden the horizon of interest of the Judeans, to include other nations, like the Moabites, in their particular,

¹ Cf. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 47–48; Bush, *Ruth / Esther*, 46; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 602–603.

² Cf. Briks, “Społeczne i prawne,” 624.

salvific relationship with Yahweh? These questions lead to the basic, fundamental problem: What was the main purpose of the writing of the book of Ruth?³ Consequently, what was the purpose of its inclusion in the canon of the Hebrew Bible? The answer to these questions is only apparently simple.

1. The Interpretative Context of the Books of Ezra–Nehemiah

The purpose of the writing of the book of Ruth seems to be evident. The prominence of the ideologically inclusive motif of Israelite men marrying a Moabite woman seems to set this book in sharp contrast to the exclusivist rhetoric of the books of Ezra–Nehemiah. The book of Ruth sees no problem whatsoever in the fact that the Israelite men Mahlon and Chilion took wives of the women of Moab (Ruth 1:4).⁴ Moreover, it sees no problem in the fact that the Judahite hero Boaz fully legally, with the consent and blessing of the elders and all the people, took the Moabite Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:10–13). These facts do not imply that the author of the book of Ruth perceived the issue of marrying a Moabite woman as not problematic at all, since the Moabite Ruth in the story explicitly states that she is a foreigner (נכרית: Ruth 2:10).⁵ Therefore, the author of the book of Ruth perceived the problem of marrying a foreign woman but solved it inclusively, by allowing or even encouraging such a practice, provided that such a woman abandons her people with her gods (Ruth 1:15–16) and clings to Yahweh, the God of Israel (Ruth 1:17; 2:12).

By contrast, the books of Ezra–Nehemiah vehemently oppose the policy of mixed marriages of the Judeans with non-Judeans. They repeatedly use the same word “foreign” (נכרית: Ezra 10:2, 10–11, 14, 17–18, 44; Neh 13:26–27), but in an opposite way, namely, to describe

³ Scholars have hitherto identified five possible purposes of the book of Ruth: 1. a polemic against Ezra and Nehemiah’s foreign wives’ policy, 2. pro-Davidic propaganda, 3. didactic teaching of wisdom, 4. entertainment, and 5. propaganda in respect to social duty. See Matheny, “Ruth in Recent Research,” 12.

⁴ Cf. Siquans, “Foreignness and Poverty,” 445.

⁵ Cf. Siquans, “Foreignness and Poverty,” 448; de Villiers, “Pentateuch,” 314; Gatti, “From Alien,” 8–10.

women whom the Judeans may not marry. Among them, the Moabites are explicitly mentioned (Ezra 9:1–2; Neh 13:1, 23). As a justification of this exclusivist policy, the book of Nehemiah quotes “the book of Moses,” that is, Deuteronomy (Neh 13:1–2; cf. Deut 23:4–6), and the book of Kings (Neh 13:23, 26; cf. 1 Kgs 11:1). It is worth noting that the book of Deuteronomy does not explicitly prohibit marrying Moabite women, limiting the prohibition to the women of the land of Canaan (Deut 7:1, 3). However, the justification of the exclusivist policy concerning the Moabite women in Ezra–Nehemiah is in fact based on a combination of the ideas of Deut 7:1–3 (prohibition of marrying women of the nations of Canaan) and Deut 23:4 (prohibition of admitting the Moabites to the assembly of Yahweh). Therefore, the justification of the exclusivist policy in Ezra–Nehemiah is religious: foreign women cause the Judeans to sin against Yahweh (Neh 13:26).

In this perspective, the rhetoric of the book of Ruth does not contradict the rhetoric of the books of Ezra–Nehemiah. Ruth is narratively presented as a proselyte woman, who abandons her people and its idolatry to cling to Yahweh, the God of Israel.⁶ Consequently, she does not cause the Judean hero Boaz to sin against Yahweh.⁷ Therefore, although numerous scholars argue that the inclusive rhetoric of the book of Ruth strongly opposes the exclusivist rhetoric of the books of Ezra–Nehemiah in the issue of mixed marriages with foreign women,⁸ the main purpose of writing the book of Ruth seems to be different than answering the latter problem.

⁶ Cf. Macios, *A było to w czasach*, 264.

⁷ The issue of possible idolatrous influence of the Moabite women Orpah and Ruth on their Ephraimite/Ephrathite husbands Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:4) will be discussed later.

⁸ Cf., among others, Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 84–87; Zenger – Frevel, “Das Buch Rut,” 283–285; de Villiers – le Roux, “The *Book of Ruth*,” 3–4; Briks, “Społeczne i prawne,” 624.

2. The Supersessive Rhetoric of the Book of Ruth

2.1. The Question of Elimelech's Tribe

The narrative thread of the book of Ruth begins “in the days when the judges judged” (Ruth 1:1), so in the narrated time of the book of Judges. Such an introduction implies that the author of the book of Ruth presumes in his audience the knowledge of the book of Judges. In particular, the plot of the book of Ruth is most likely modeled on some elements of the concluding part of the book of Judges (Judg 17–21).⁹ For example, the statement, “And a man from Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell as alien in” (*וילך איש מבית לחם יהודה לגור ב* Ruth 1:1) was almost verbatim borrowed from Judg 17:8 (cf. 17:7, 9), and it occurs only in these two texts in the Hebrew Bible, which additionally proves the hypothesis of direct and conscious borrowing.¹⁰

It is important to note that the character described in Judg 17:7–9 was from a family/clan of (ממשפחת) Judah, although he was a Levite, so that he was a member of a different tribe, not that of Judah (Judg 17:7). Therefore, in line with the hermeneutic principle of giving serious attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture (*Dei Verbum* 12), the fact that in the story of the book of Ruth, which is modeled on that of Judg 17:7–9, Boaz was from the family/clan of (ממשפחת) Elimelech (Ruth 2:1, 3) does not imply that Elimelech was of the same tribe as Boaz, namely, the tribe of Judah.¹¹

In fact, the same concluding part of the book of Judges, which served as a departure point for the plot of the book of Ruth, gives an example of an Ephraimite dwelling in the territory of another tribe, south of Ephraim (Judg 19:16), an idea which could function as a model for the story of Elimelech living in Bethlehem of Judah. Moreover, the same story from the concluding part of the book

⁹ Cf. Gerhards, *Ursprung*, 74. For arguments that Judg 17–21 is an integral part of the book of Judges, see Adamczewski, *Deuteronomy–Judges*, 201–209.

¹⁰ Another phrase which was probably borrowed from Judg 17–21, but given a different meaning in the book of Ruth (“take a wife,” not “carry away a woman”), is *נשא + אשה* (Judg 21:23; Ruth 1:4). For more connections between Judg 19–21 and the book of Ruth, see Avnery, “On the Threshold,” 230–248; Matheny, *Judges 19–21*, 226–248.

¹¹ The Judahite identity of Boaz can be deduced from the mention and importance of Judah in the blessing Ruth 4:12.

of Judges presents a Levite from the territory of Ephraim taking for himself a Judahite woman from Bethlehem of Judah (Judg 19:1, 8: מִבֵּית לַחֵם יְהוּדָה), a phrase which reappears in Ruth 1:1–2 (and 1 Sam 17:12).¹² Consequently, the Ephraimite Levite and the Judahite father of his concubine were members of the same family, and their relationships were very cordial, reaching far beyond customary hospitality (Judg 19:3–9), although they were not members of the same tribe.

An example of an intertribal marriage, constituting a familial relationship between two different tribes, can be found, for example, in the familial link between Aaron from the tribe of Levi and Amminadab and Nahshon from the tribe of Judah (Exod 6:23; cf. Num 1:7 etc.). The knowledge of these characters is again assumed in the book of Ruth (Ruth 4:19–20). Legal consequences of such intertribal marriages, which preserved their tribal identity and possibly also possession until the jubilee year, are discussed in Num 36:3–4.

Therefore, the statement that Boaz belonged to the same family as Elimelech (Ruth 2:1, 3) does not imply that they were of the same tribe.¹³ For example, if Elimelech's father and Boaz's mother were married (or their mothers were married to the same man, as was the case of Rachel and Leah, who are mentioned in Ruth 4:11), then they were members of the same family, although they could belong to two different tribes. Such a situation is particularly plausible in view of the fact that Elimelech and Boaz are described as quite distant relatives (Ruth 3:12), so that Ruth and Boaz did not know each other beforehand (Ruth 2:5). An intertribal marital link somewhere between Elimelech's and Boaz's rather distant relatives could bring them into the same family, at least from the point of view of legal redemption, although they could still preserve their different tribal identities.

¹² Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 125; Gerhards, *Ursprung*, 73.

¹³ The same refers, for example, to John the Baptist and Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. It is worth noting that Luke presents this fact in a way which is even less explicit than in the book of Ruth, although it plays an important role for his theology (the passage from law to grace, etc.).

2.2. Ephrathites or Ephraimites?

The remarks concerning the names of the heroes of the story in the book of Ruth formally resemble the similar remark in 1 Sam 1:1: “and the name (וּשְׁם) of ... was N.” (Ruth 1:2). Likewise, the following theophoric name of the male hero in the book of Ruth, Elimelech (*אל: Ruth 1:2), corresponds to the following theophoric name of the male hero in the book of Samuel, Elkanah (*אל: 1 S1Sam 1:1). For these reasons, also the gentilic name אַפְרַתִּים in Ruth 1:2 should most naturally be regarded as corresponding to the gentilic name אַפְרַתִּי (“Ephraimite”) in 1 Sam 1:1.

The meaning of the gentilic name אַפְרַתִּי is clear in its earliest occurrence in the Bible, namely, in Judg 12:5. In that text and in its immediate context (Judg 12:1, 4–6), the gentilic name אַפְרַתִּי is surrounded by eight references to Ephraim (אֶפְרַיִם), so it certainly refers to a member of the tribe of Ephraim, that is, an “Ephraimite.” The same semantic derivation is also evident in 1 Sam 1:1, where the gentilic names אֶפְרַיִם (“Ephraim”) and אַפְרַתִּי (“Ephraimite”) are juxtaposed. A similar juxtaposition between the gentilic names אַפְרַתִּי in 1 Kgs 11:26 and יוֹסֵף (“Joseph”) in 1 Kgs 11:28 again implies that the former refers to a member of the tribe of Ephraim and means “Ephraimite.”¹⁴

Moreover, the book of Ruth explicitly assumes that the reader already knows the scriptural story of Rachel as a mother (Ruth 4:11), who died in Ephrathah (אֶפְרַתָּה: Gen 35:16–19; cf. Ruth 4:11) while bearing Benjamin, the only full brother of Joseph (and consequently Ephraim) and not of Judah. Therefore, it assumes that the reader already knows that this Ephrathah was located in the North rather than in the South (in Judah).¹⁵

The surprising correlation between the gentilic name אַפְרַתִּי and toponymic remark concerning the hero’s origin מִבֵּית לַחֵם יְהוּדָה (“from Bethlehem in Judah”) in both Ruth 1:2 and 1 Sam 17:12 seems to have a special function. It most likely alludes to the prophecy Mic 5:1, which refers to a ruler in Israel originating from Bethlehem (בֵּית לַחֵם),

¹⁴ Cf. Bush, *Ruth / Esther*, 64.

¹⁵ See the discussion in Adamczewski, *Genesis*, 165–167; Koenen, “Efrata / Efrat,” 2. Das nördliche Efrata in Benjamin (Benjamins Geburt).

which is Ephrathah (אפרתה), located in Judah (יהודה). This allusion is most clear in Ruth 4:11. That text, in the form of a blessing, in a quasi-prophetic way juxtaposes references to Israel (ישראל), Ephrathah (אפרתה), and Bethlehem (בית לחם), thus alluding to the prophecy Mic 5:1.

Accordingly, in all other instances in the Hebrew Bible, apart from Ruth 1:2 and 1 Sam 17:12, the word אפרתי certainly means “Ephraimite.”¹⁶ In the surprising, most probably later text 1 Sam 17:12 concerning David, unexpectedly introduced as the son of “this *Ephrathi* (אפרתי) man,” although there is no earlier reference to Ephrathah in the books of Samuel–Kings, apart from the use of the name *Ephrathi* (אפרתי) in 1 Sam 1:1 in the meaning “Ephraimite,” the meaning of the word *Ephrathi* (אפרתי) is enigmatic. Likewise, the meaning of the name אפרתים in Ruth 1:2 is also enigmatic rather than evident. If its meaning were synonymous to “Bethlehemites,” its use in Ruth 1:2 would be tautologous.

It should be noted that the reader, as is rightly assumed in narratological and reader-response exegesis, reads the book of Ruth from the beginning, including Ruth 1:2 (אפרתים), having in mind the explicitly and implicitly recalled in Ruth 1:1 book of Judges, with its use of the name אפרתי in the meaning “Ephraimite” (Judg 12:5), and not from the end, from the prophetic allusion to Ephrathah (cf. Mic 5:1) in Ruth 4:11. Therefore, the only meaning which the reader may assume for the word אפרתים in Ruth 1:2 is “Ephraimites.” Moreover, the use of the plural name form אפרתים in Ruth 1:2, which linguistically closely resembles the name Ephraim (אפרים), also suggests this meaning.

Therefore, the use of the plural gentilic name form אפרתים in Ruth 1:2 is most probably consciously ambiguous. Against the background of its use in the earlier, explicitly recalled book of Judges it most naturally refers, like in Judg 12:5 (cf. 1 Sam 1:1; 1 Kgs 11:26), to members of the tribe of Ephraim (“Ephraimites”).¹⁷ Moreover, against the background of the scriptural story of Rachel

¹⁶ Cf. Gerhards, *Ursprung*, 77.

¹⁷ Cf. Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 38, 51, 62; Japhet, “Was David a Judahite,” 299–300, 303–305; Na’aman, “The Settlement of the Ephrathites,” 522–525.

the name Ephrathah most naturally points to the North rather than to the South. However, the name אפרתים in Ruth 1:2 can also, maybe similarly to 1 Sam 17:12 (cf. Ruth 4:11), refer to inhabitants of Ephrathah (“Ephrathites”).

2.3. The Perishing Ephraimites Mahlon and Chilion

The opening reference to the “Ephraimites” (אפרתים) in Ruth 1:2 is particularly important for the supersessive rhetoric of the book of Ruth. Any reader who knows Hebrew can easily notice that whereas the theophoric name of the father Elimelech, like that of Elkanah in 1 Sam 1:1, has positive overtones, the names of his sons point in a negative direction. The name of Mahlon (מחלון) derives from the root חלה (“be weak, be ill”), thus pointing to “sickness.” Similarly, the name of Chilion (כליון) derives from the root כלה (“come to an end, vanish, perish”), thus pointing to “extinction”¹⁸ (cf. Isa 10:22: “annihilation, destruction”¹⁹; Deut 28:65: “failing”). Moreover, their names contain a suffix often used for diminutives (ון*), which could suggest the meaning “sickling” and “weakling.”²⁰

The reader can find here a negative semantic progress: from the positive meaning of Elimelech (“My God is king”), through the negative meaning of Mahlon (“sickness”), to the destructive meaning of Chilion (“extinction”). No wonder that ten years after the death of Elimelech (Ruth 1:3), in line with the rhetorical principle *nomen est omen*, both individuals who bore the doom-laden names, Mahlon and Chilion, also died (Ruth 1:5). Henceforth, they are usually referred to in the narrative simply as “the dead ones” (Ruth 1:8; 2:20; 4:5, 10; cf. 2:11).²¹ Moreover, the story implies that even after ten years

See also Koenen, “Efrata / Efrat,” 4.2. Efratiter als Judäer mit efraimitischem Migrationshintergrund.

¹⁸ Cf. Shuchat, “The Use of Symbolism,” 111; Hackett, “Ruth’s Beginnings,” 265; Vayntrub, “Like Father, Like Son,” 519.

¹⁹ Cf. Schipper, *Ruth*, 82.

²⁰ Cf. Quick, “The Book of Ruth,” 64. On the other hand, the similarly coined noun הריון (“conception”) in Ruth 4:13 seems to have no diminutive meaning.

²¹ Cf. Schipper, “The Use of *bl̄*,” 600.

of marriage neither of them produced children,²² although at least Ruth was capable of having children (cf. Ruth 4:13).²³

It is worth noting that, paradoxically, the marital relations of both Mahlon and Chilion seem to have no importance in the narrative of the book of Ruth.²⁴ After the initial remark concerning Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:2), they are described commonly as “two sons” (Ruth 1:3). Then the narrator states, “They took for themselves Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth” (Ruth 1:4). The narrator does not even bother to mention who married whom! The reader could only deduce that the earlier-mentioned Mahlon married the earlier-mentioned Orpah, and the later-mentioned Chilion married the later-mentioned Ruth.²⁵ But, in contrast to this expectation, this was not the case. The final part of the story makes clear that Ruth was the wife of Mahlon, and not of Chilion (Ruth 4:10). However, even this fact does not imply that the narrator finally explains the marital connections of Mahlon and Chilion. In the concluding part of the story, the order of the names of the two brothers is carelessly reversed to Chilion and Mahlon (Ruth 4:9). This fact increases confusion in the marital relations between Mahlon and Chilion on the one hand and Orpah and Ruth on the other. It is difficult to avoid the impression that it is of really no importance who was the older brother and who married which woman.

Therefore, Mahlon and Chilion function in the narrative simply as two consciously one-dimensional, “flat” characters.²⁶ What is really important for the narrative rhetoric of the book of Ruth is the fact that they bear doom-laden names (Ruth 1:2), that they, together with their father Elimelech, are Ephraimites (Ruth 1:2), and that they, not long after their father Elimelech (Ruth 1:3–4), die (Ruth 1:5).

This combination of the features of Mahlon and Chilion, namely, that they were Ephraimites, that they were doomed to die, and that they

²² Cf. Pyper, “Other Mothers,” 316; Esler, “All That You Have Done,” 652.

²³ Cf. Hackett, “Ruth’s Beginnings,” 266. Pace Stone, “Six Measures of Barley,” 198, n. 37, who unconvincingly argues that it was Ruth, and not Mahlon and Chilion, who was infertile.

²⁴ Cf. Macios, *A było to w czasach*, 234.

²⁵ Cf. Schipper, *Ruth*, 25.

²⁶ Cf. Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 66, 73.

in fact died (Ruth 1:2–5), creates the first stage of the supersessive rhetoric of the book of Ruth. By means of the combination of these features, with the use of the rhetorical figure of synecdoche (*pars pro toto*), the story conveys the idea of the doom which befell the members of the tribe of Ephraim. Even if they were initially blessed and faithful, as the theophoric name of Elimelech could suggest, their fate was strongly negative. They were destined to grow weak and to perish, which in fact happened, as can be deduced from the death of all Ephraimite characters in the story (Ruth 1:3, 5).

2.4. The Mighty Judahite Boaz

The second part of the story describes the return of the widowed Naomi with the likewise widowed Ruth to the land of Judah (Ruth 1:6–22) and Ruth's meeting with Boaz (Ruth 2–3). The meaning of the name Boaz (בועז) is somewhat enigmatic. In 1 Kgs 7:21, it refers to one of two pillars of bronze in the Jerusalem temple. Their height was eighteen cubits, and their circumference was twelve cubits (1 Kgs 7:15). Accordingly, they were really massive. Their names illustrated this massiveness. The name of one of the pillars was Jachin (יכין), which means, "He will establish/make firm." The name of the other, Boaz, most likely semantically corresponds to that of Jachin. Therefore, it probably means, "In him (ב) is strength/might (עז)"²⁷ (cf. Exod 15:13: בעוז – "in your strength";²⁸ 2 Chr 3:17 LXX: Ἰσχυς).²⁹

This understanding of the meaning of the name Boaz, which can be deduced from 1 Kgs 7:21, exactly corresponds to the narrative features of the character of Boaz in the book of Ruth.³⁰ In this text, he is described as a mighty man (גבור) of power/strength/wealth (חיל: Ruth 2:1).³¹

²⁷ Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 35; Zenger – Frevel, "Das Buch Rut," 284.

²⁸ Cf. Embry, "Redemption-Acquisition," 263; Jackson, "The One Who Returned," 446.

²⁹ Cf. Prokop, *Pillars*, 69, 74.

³⁰ Cf. Fewell – Gunn, "Boaz," 54, n. 6.

³¹ Cf. Purcell, "Playing the Man," 491–493.

2.5. Supersessive Rhetoric in Ruth: From Ephraim to Judah

The book of Ruth makes a sharp contrast between the Ephraimite characters of Mahlon and Chilion on the one hand and the Judahite character of Boaz on the other. Whereas the names of Mahlon and Chilion convey the idea of being ill and perishing, the name of Boaz conveys the idea of strength. Whereas Mahlon and Chilion suffer from famine (Ruth 1:1–2), Boaz has a field full of grain ready to be reaped (Ruth 2:3). Whereas Mahlon and Chilion die prematurely, leaving no offspring (Ruth 1:4–5), Boaz is in the prime of his life (Ruth 3:10) and begets a son (Ruth 4:13).

The contrast between the Ephraimite characters of Mahlon and Chilion on the one hand and the Judahite character of Boaz on the other also concerns religious matters. The book of Ruth neither explicitly confirms nor explicitly denies the possibility of idolatrous influence of the Moabite women Orpah and Ruth on their Ephraimite husbands Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:4). In fact, it states that Orpah went back to her people and to her gods (Ruth 1:15), thus suggesting that she was always idolatrous.³² The same could refer to Ruth before she decided to go with Naomi.³³ Only at that time, after the death of Mahlon (Ruth 1:16–17; 2:11), she became a Yahwist proselyte.³⁴

It is noteworthy that the Ephraimite Naomi in the land of Moab also became “bitter” (Ruth 1:13, 20), “empty” (Ruth 1:21), and half-pagan, since she attributed all her problems to Yahweh (Ruth 1:13) and later to the unnamed Almighty (Ruth 1:20–21),³⁵ apparently even linguistically switching from the sacred Hebrew and its “pleasantness” (the meaning of the name Naomi: נעמי) to the pagan Aramaic in referring to herself in an Aramaic-like way as מרה (Ruth 1:20).³⁶ Therefore, it seems plausible that the book of Ruth not only leaves the possibility of idolatrous influence of the Moabite women on their Ephraimite husbands and relatives consciously open, but

³² Pace Jackson, “Ruth, the Pentateuch,” 88–89; Decker, “Contrastive Characterization,” 913.

³³ Cf. Thambyrajah, “Israelite or Moabite?,” 56.

³⁴ Cf. Kušmirek, “Moja córko,” 115; de Villiers, “Pentateuch,” 313.

³⁵ Cf. Gerhards, *Ursprung*, 130.

³⁶ Cf. Hackett, “Ruth’s Beginnings,” 272; Decker, “Contrastive Characterization,” 911, 921–926.

it actually suggests such influence. In this way, it makes a sharp contrast between the idolatrous Ephraimites Mahlon and Chilion on the one hand (Ruth 1:4) and the strongly Yahwistic and pious³⁷ Judean hero Boaz on the other (Ruth 2:4, 11–12; 3:10, 13).

Accordingly, by means of the rhetorical figure of synecdoche (*pars pro toto*), the book of Ruth depicts the tribe of Ephraim as weak, perishing, and idolatrous, and the tribe of Judah as powerful, flourishing, and strongly Yahwistic. Moreover, the narrative sequence of the depictions of these tribes persuades the reader that the flourishing and pious tribe of Judah takes the place of the perishing and idolatrous tribe of Ephraim. In this way, it creates the supersessive pro-Judahite rhetoric of this book.

This supersessive rhetoric is further developed with the creative use of the motifs of marriage, widowhood, and levirate “redemption.” As was noted above, the motif of marriage has no significant role in the creation of the particular features of the Ephraimite characters of Mahlon and Chilion. They function in the story not as individuals, but rather as a pair of ill and perishing Ephraimite brothers. For the narrative thread of the story, it is only important that one of them married the Moabite woman named Ruth (Ruth 1:4). It is also important that she came back, together with Naomi, as a widow to the land of Judah (Ruth 1:22). In the land of Judah, she is married again. However, she is not married to the closest but unnamed relative of the Ephraimite Elimelech (Ruth 4:1–8). She is redeemed (Ruth 4:4), acquired (Ruth 4:5, 9–10),³⁸ and taken as a quasi-levirate wife by the Judahite hero Boaz (Ruth 4:13).

In this way, through a creative application³⁹ of the old Israelite legal procedures of property redemption and levirate marriage (Ruth 4:7–8;

³⁷ Cf. Fewell – Gunn, “Boaz,” 46.

³⁸ Cf. Jackson, “Ruth, the Pentateuch,” 83; Embry, “Legalities,” 40; Hayes, “Intentional Ambiguity,” 178.

³⁹ The law of redemption is applied in Ruth 4:5, 10 in an unclear and inconsistent way (redeeming Ruth’s property and then Ruth herself). The Deuteronomic levirate law in the book of Ruth is only alluded to and not applied in a literal way (Ruth 4:7–8). Therefore, the application of these laws illustrates in the book of Ruth ideas other than merely legal cases.

cf. Lev 25:24–54; Deut 25:5–10),⁴⁰ both the property and the name of the perished Ephraimites are acquired by the Judahite hero (Ruth 4:9–10). Thus, by means of the rhetorical figure of synecdoche (*pars pro toto*), the narrative suggests that the material and spiritual heritage of the tribe of Ephraim, including legal traditions of the former Israel, are now taken over by the tribe of Judah.

Therefore, the blessing uttered, significantly, by “all the people” in the form of poetic parallelism⁴¹ suggests that Ruth should be both (a) like Rachel, the mother of Joseph (Gen 30:22–24) and the grandmother of Ephraim (Gen 41:52), and (b) like Leah, the mother of Judah (Gen 29:32, 35), who together, the two of them, built the house of Israel,⁴² so that Boaz should prosper (a) in Ephrathah and (b) in Bethlehem (Ruth 4:11).

May Yahweh make the woman...

1. like Rachel, [Joseph → Ephraim]

2. like Leah. [Judah]

The two of them built the house of Israel.

May you prosper

1. in Ephrathah,

2. in Bethlehem.

The audience of Ruth 4:11, which was evidently supposed to know the scriptural story of Leah and Rachel, certainly knew that, in contrast to the claim expressed in Ruth 4:11, Rachel and Leah, the two of them, did not build the house of Israel. They only built its postexilic core, centered around the tribes of Ephraim and Judah, with their rivalry concerning the heritage of the historical Israel.

Moreover, the order of mentioning Rachel and Leah in Ruth 4:11 is surprisingly reversed in comparison to that in the original scriptural story of Leah, the mother of Judah (Gen 29:32, 35), and Rachel, the mother of Joseph (Gen 30:22–24) and the grandmother

⁴⁰ The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy originate from Israel (Samaria), and not from Judah. See the discussions and arguments presented in Adamczewski, “Roles,” 482–485; Adamczewski, *Exodus–Numbers*, 37–40; Adamczewski, *Deuteronomy–Judges*, 32–36.

⁴¹ Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 723.

⁴² Pace Davis, “Literary Effect,” 509, n. 47, the “mixed” blessing referring to both Rachel and Leah (Ruth 4:11) concerns Ruth, and not Naomi.

of Ephraim (Gen 41:52). Likewise, the order of mentioning Ephrathah and Bethlehem in Ruth 4:11 is surprisingly reversed in comparison to the presumably earlier scriptural prophecy Mic 5:1 (“Bethlehem Ephrathah”). This reversed order of Rachel and Leah (so Ephraim and Judah) as well as Ephrathah and Bethlehem in the blessing Ruth 4:11 both conceptually (Ephraim and Judah) and linguistically (“Ephrathah” and Bethlehem) in an allusive way conveys the supersessive idea of the passage of the heritage of the house of Israel from Ephraim to Judah.

At the final stage of the plot of the book of Ruth (Ruth 4:14–17), the women’s blessing suggests that the Judahite heir Obed will restore and sustain the now old and childless Ephraimite Naomi (Ruth 4:15).⁴³ The unifying link between the two tribes is strengthened by the new, now direct connection between the Ephraimite childless woman and her Judahite “son” (Ruth 4:16–17). Therefore, surprisingly, the apparently most important, mediating character of the Moabite Ruth (cf. Ruth 4:10–13) is taken off the narrative stage as no longer necessary for creating direct intra-Israelite (“filial”) relations between Ephraim and Judah (Ruth 4:16–17).⁴⁴

The intermediate stage of the legal procedure of redemption, involving the surprisingly and apparently redundantly introduced character of the closest but unnamed relative of the Ephraimite Elimelech (Ruth 4:1–8), explains the fact that, unlike Benjamin (cf. Gen 35:24), whose name means “the son of the south/right hand,” presumably of Ephraim, the tribe of Judah was not the closest neighbor and kin of the Ephraimites.

⁴³ Cf. Bush, *Ruth / Esther*, 253–255, 264; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 727–729; Schipper, *Ruth*, 182.

⁴⁴ Cf. Thambyrajah, “Israelite or Moabite?,” 55: “the final (indirect) references to Ruth as a mother are in 4:13, whereas the explicit description of Naomi as mother is the last word on the subject [...].”

3. Similarity to the Supersessive Rhetoric of the Books of Samuel–Kings

According to *Dei Verbum* 12, “serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out.” Therefore, the rhetoric of the book of Ruth should be analyzed in the context of the rhetoric of other scriptural texts, in this case, especially the books of Samuel–Kings, which also justify the rise of the Davidic dynasty in Israel. In fact, the analysis of the supersessive rhetoric of the books of Samuel–Kings confirms the above-presented hypothesis concerning the rhetoric and the main purpose of writing of the book of Ruth.

3.1. Rejection of the Ephraimite Shiloh

The key to the understanding of the main purpose of the writing of the books of Samuel–Kings is the recent discovery of the northern (Israelite) origin of the whole Heptateuch Genesis–Judges.⁴⁵ In contrast to Martin Noth’s hypothesis of the existence of a lengthy Deuteronomistic History, which allegedly reached from Deuteronomy to Kings, I have recently argued that the biblical books from Genesis to Judges originate from the Persian-period Samaria,⁴⁶ whereas the books of Samuel–Kings originate from early Hellenistic Judaea.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the religio-political rhetoric of the southern books of Samuel–Kings is radically different from the religio-political rhetoric of the northern Heptateuch Genesis–Judges, especially in the issues of the identity of the particularly chosen tribe and the location of the divinely chosen place of the worship of Yahweh.

The action of the books of Samuel–Kings begins where the action of the books of Joshua–Judges ends, namely, in Shiloh (1 Sam 1:3; cf. Judg 21:21). In Judg 21:21 this place is presented as located

⁴⁵ Cf. Adamczewski, “Roles,” 481–500.

⁴⁶ See the discussions and arguments presented in Adamczewski, *Genesis*, 25–36; Adamczewski, *Exodus–Numbers*, 32–40; Adamczewski, *Deuteronomy–Judges*, 26–36.

⁴⁷ See the discussion and arguments presented in Adamczewski, *Samuel–Kings*, 23–29.

north of the land of Benjamin, so presumably in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. The Ephraimite location of Shiloh is also indirectly confirmed in the book of Joshua, in which the Ephraimite (cf. Josh 24:33) priestly leader Eleazar and the likewise Ephraimite (cf. Josh 19:49–50; 24:30; Judg 2:9) lay leader Joshua, together with the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, finally apportion the land to the Israelite tribes as an inheritance precisely in Shiloh (Josh 19:51; cf. 21:2–2). The Ephraimite location of Shiloh can also be deduced from Josh 16:1–2; 18:13, texts which describe the border between Ephraim and Benjamin as running south of Bethel, and Judg 21:19, which refers to Shiloh as located north of Bethel, so presumably also in the territory of Ephraim. Therefore, Shiloh can securely be located in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim.⁴⁸

Moreover, the father of Samuel, the main hero of the opening part of the story of Samuel–Kings, is described as originating from the hill country of Ephraim and explicitly identified as an Ephraimite (אפרתי: 1 Sam 1:1).⁴⁹ His name Elkanah, which is also known from Exod 6:24, is theophoric, coined with the use of the divine name El (*לא: 1 Sam 1:1).

The subsequent story of the young Samuel and the sons of Eli (1 Sam 1:3–4:1a) conveys the idea of the divine rejection of the wicked sons of Eli and the transfer of divine grace upon the innocent Samuel (esp. 1 Sam 2:25–26). The motif of the divine rejection of the house of Eli, now even more explicitly related to the Israelite (cf. 1 Sam 14:18) sanctuary at Shiloh,⁵⁰ reappears later in the story of Samuel–Kings (1 Kgs 2:27). The Ephraimite sanctuary at Shiloh, which had once been the central sanctuary of Yahweh and later the dwelling

⁴⁸ Cf. Finkelstein, “Introduction,” 1–2; Lemański, *Arka Przymierza*, 68; Knittel, *Heiligtum*, 34.

⁴⁹ Cf. H. Ramantswana, “Tribal Contentions,” 86–88.

⁵⁰ The preexilic destruction of Shiloh was for the Judeans almost proverbial (cf. Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9), so that it could function as a literary motif in the books of Samuel–Kings. However, the identification of this destruction with archaeological data is much more problematic: see Scholz, “The Disneyfication of Shiloh,” 119–127. For a suggestion that Shiloh in 1 Sam 1–4 in fact “functions as something of an alias for the Samaritan sanctuary at Shechem, on Mount Gerizim,” see Jericke, “Shiloh,” 258.

place of the high priest Ahijah (1 Sam 14:3.18), becomes the dwelling place of another Ahijah, now merely an Israelite prophet (1 Kgs 11:29; 12:15; 14:2.4; 15:29). The motif of a priest (כהן) named Phinehas (פִּינְחָס), son of an important Ephraimite high priest (1 Sam 1:3), was borrowed from Josh 22:13; 24:33; etc. to make the description of the Ephraimite priesthood yet more persuasive.

The account of the divine rejection of the priestly house of Eli is in fact only a prelude to the much more important narrative, namely, that of the transfer of the ark of the covenant from the Ephraimite Shiloh to the Judean border town Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 4:1b–7:2).⁵¹

3.2. Transfer of the Ark from Ephraim to Judah

The narrative opens with the story of the Philistines taking the ark captive (1 Sam 4:1b–22). This fact is narratively justified by the presence of the wicked sons of Eli, who were condemned by Yahweh to death (1 Sam 2:25.34), with the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 4:4.11.17; cf. Judg 20:27–28). Accordingly, the narrative suggests that the fact of taking the ark captive by the Philistines was in fact caused by Yahweh himself.⁵²

The account of the humiliation and affliction which was caused by the ark of God in the cities of the Philistines (1 Sam 5) contains much anti-pagan polemic (cf. Deut 7:23 etc.).⁵³ However, in narrative terms, it mainly paves the way for the following story of the return of the ark to the land of Israel (1 Sam 6:1–7:2).

This crucial story is introduced with the idea of the resolve of all the lords of the Philistines (cf. Judg 16:27) to send away

⁵¹ Kiriath-jearim is presented in Josh 15:9; 18:14–15 as a border town of the tribe of Judah, and in Josh 15:60; 18:14; Judg 18:12 it is explicitly described as a town of the sons of Judah, although it may have earlier belonged to the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Josh 9:17). Cf. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 137; Ronowska, “Kiriath-jearim,” 10; Hensel, “The Ark Narrative(s),” 174. Pace Römer, “Katastrophengeschichte,” 272, in Josh 18:14 Kiriath-jearim is explicitly described as a town of the sons of Judah. Pace Finkelstein – Römer, “Historical and Archaeological,” 163, Josh 18:28 refers to Kiriath-jearim only after a textual conjecture.

⁵² Cf. Lemański, “Opowiadanie,” 17.

⁵³ Cf. Porzig, *Die Lade Jahwes*, 143–148.

the ark of the God of Israel, to let it return “to its place” (למקומו: 1 Sam 5:11). The same idea of sending away the ark of Yahweh “to its place” (למקומו) reappears in the question of the Philistines posed to their priests and diviners (1 Sam 6:2). Since the ark came to the Philistines from Shiloh (1 Sam 4:3–4), the narrative logic expressed in the resolve of the Philistine lords (1 Sam 5:11) and in the question of the Philistines (1 Sam 6:2) quite naturally suggests that the ark should return to the same place from which it came to them. More precisely, if the term “place” (מקום) is used here in its post-Deuteronomic cultic meaning, as the use of the same suffixed noun מקומו in 1 Kgs 8:6 suggests, the ark should return to the same sanctuary from which it was taken, that is, the one at Shiloh. However, the story of the return of the ark to the land of Israel (1 Sam 6:1–7:2) shows that this initial narrative expectation is in fact misleading. The ark does not return to the Ephraimite sanctuary at Shiloh but to another place.⁵⁴

The route of the ark to another place is already predicted by the Philistine priests and diviners. They suggest that the ark will go up to the way to “its own territory,” which is understood by them as located not in Shiloh, but in Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:9). The location of this Beth-shemesh could in itself be unclear (cf. Josh 19:22: Beth-shemesh in Issachar; Josh 19:32; Judg 1:33: Beth-shemesh in Naphtali), but the narrative logic of the story implies that Beth-shemesh is understood here as a border town in Judea (cf. Josh 15:10; 21:16).⁵⁵

The choice of Beth-shemesh as the arrival point of the ark of Yahweh was not made by humans. Both the characters of the Philistine priests and diviners (1 Sam 6:7–9) and the narrator (1 Sam 6:10–12) in an apparently redundant, repetitive way commonly highlight the fact that the ark was taken to Beth-shemesh not by humans, but by two milk cows on which a yoke has never come (cf. Num 19:2), so that they did not previously have the experience of pulling a cart in any direction. Consequently, the animals had no internal preference or external human training to choose a particular

⁵⁴ Cf. Römer, “Katastrophengeschichte,” 261, 269.

⁵⁵ Cf. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 59; Finkelstein – Römer, “Historical and Archaeological,” 181; Hensel, “The Ark Narrative(s),” 173.

direction in pulling the cart with the ark of Yahweh. Nevertheless, as the narrator states, “the cows went straight on the way, on the way to Beth-shemesh, they went on one track, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left” (1 Sam 6:12).

The narrative thus suggests that since the direction of the cows’ move was not decided by humans, and it was not caused by the animals’ previous experience, it must have been chosen by Yahweh.⁵⁶ It was Yahweh who influenced the two animals in such a way that they both, with firm resolve, with one accord, pulled the cart with the ark of Yahweh not back to the Ephraimite sanctuary at Shiloh, but to the Judean town of Beth-shemesh. Consequently, the story of Yahweh, with no human participation, causing animals to carry the ark of Yahweh to Judea (1 Sam 6:7–12) illustrates the Deuteronomic cultic idea of “the place which Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put his name there, to make it dwell there” (Deut 12:5). Besides, the motif of Yahweh’s rejection of the former sanctuary at Shiloh and the choice of a sanctuary in Judah, ultimately in Jerusalem, could have been borrowed from Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9.

The account of the arrival of the ark in Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:13–18) contains numerous cultic ideas and allusions.⁵⁷ In particular, the otherwise unknown character of Joshua (יהושע), related to a similarly otherwise unknown large stone (אבן גדולה) which was there (שם), and offering a burnt offering to Yahweh (1 Sam 6:14), is a Judean reworking of the northern, Ephraimite (Josh 24:30) character of Joshua, related to a large stone in the sanctuary of Yahweh at Shechem, so the place of offering burnt offerings to Yahweh (Josh 24:26). The idea of the sanctuary of Yahweh (Josh 24:26) is further illustrated in the story of Samuel with the use of the image of the suddenly appearing Levites, who surprisingly appear here for the first time in the narrative of Samuel–Kings, as well as the partly repeated idea of the people of Beth-shemesh offering burnt offerings and making sacrifices to Yahweh (1 Sam 6:15). The following, somewhat surprising in this context idea of the large stone (אבן) at

⁵⁶ Cf. Lemański, *Arka Przymierza*, 89.

⁵⁷ Cf. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 102.

the field of Joshua (יהושע) being a witness (עד: 1 Sam 6:18) alludes to the likewise following idea of the stone at Shechem being a witness to Joshua and the people (Josh 24:27).

Similarly, the following ideas of sending (*וישלח) people to Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 6:21), and the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim bringing the ark up (העלו) to their town (1 Sam 6:21–7:1) seem to allude to the following ideas of Joshua sending the people to their inheritance (Josh 24:28), and the sons of Israel bringing up the bones of Joseph to Shechem (Josh 24:32). The concluding idea of the otherwise unknown, suddenly consecrated Judean priest Eleazar, son of Abinadab (*אלעזר בן*; contra 2 Sam 6:3–4: no such character), dwelling on a hill (בגבעה: 1 Sam 7:1), is a Judean reworking of the concluding idea of the Ephraimite priest Eleazar, son of Aaron, dwelling on a hill/Gibeah (Josh 24:33).

These consciously made, sequentially organized allusions to the foundation story of the Ephraimite sanctuary at Shechem (Josh 24:26–33) in the account of the arrival of the ark in Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:13–18) and in Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 6:19–7:1) rhetorically suggest that the location of the unique, chosen, pan-Israelite sanctuary of Yahweh was changed from the Ephraimite city of Shechem (Josh 24:26–27) to the Judean border town Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:13–18), later to the likewise Judean border town Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 6:19–7:2), to the city of David (2 Sam 6:2–17), and finally to the temple “house” in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:1–11; esp. 8:6).

3.3. Supersessive Rhetoric in Samuel–Kings: from Ephraim to Judah

The rhetoric of the books of Samuel–Kings is therefore highly supersessive. It conveys the idea of the transfer of Yahweh’s grace and election from the tribe of Ephraim to the tribe of Judah.⁵⁸ Likewise,

⁵⁸ Cf. Edenburg, “Radiance,” 171–172: “it might be fruitful to view the expanded narrative arc in light of post-exilic polemics directed against Samaria, similar to the sentiments found in Ps 78:60–69.” Cf. also Ahlström, “The Travels of the Ark,” 141–149, who argues for the presence of religio-political rhetoric in the ark narrative, but sees it as referring to the increase of the territory under the dominion of Yahweh, and not to the rivalry between Ephraim and Judah.

it conveys the idea of the relocation of “the place which Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put his name there, to make it dwell there” (Deut 12:5) from the Ephraimite sanctuary at Shiloh (and from Shechem, which is condemned to *damnatio memoriae* in Samuel–Kings except for 1 Kgs 12:1, 25)⁵⁹ to the Judean border towns Beth-shemesh and Kiriath-jearim, and finally to the temple “house” in Jerusalem.⁶⁰ The rhetoric of the books of Samuel–Kings suggests that the transfer of the chosen cultic place away from Ephraim, via Philistia, was initially caused by the sins of the Ephraimite priests, but its final relocation to Judea was caused by Yahweh himself, so that in Judea it is really “the place which Yahweh your God chooses” (Deut 12:5).

If we seek the main purpose of writing the books of Samuel–Kings, it can be found precisely here, in the supersessive rhetoric of these books, justifying the divinely chosen status of the tribe of Judah and the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the narrative rhetoric of Samuel–Kings is in this respect so strong, that it gave rise to the false impression, which was held for centuries, that the Hebrew Bible as a whole points to the Jerusalem temple as the only legitimate cultic place of the worship of Yahweh.⁶¹

Accordingly, the supersessive rhetoric of the book of Ruth closely resembles the supersessive rhetoric of the books of Samuel–Kings. Both writings present the passage of divine election and grace from the Ephraimites to the Judahites, and later the rise of the Davidic dynasty, through an intermediate stage of some non-Israelites, who are removed from the narrative stage as soon as this intra-Israelite passage has been accomplished.

⁵⁹ Cf. Adamczewski, *Samuel–Kings*, 211.

⁶⁰ Cf. Ramantswana, “Tribal Contentions,” 92: “[...] the ark of the covenant is lost from the hill country of Ephraim [...]. The ark of the covenant has begun a journey that will ultimately culminate in Jerusalem. [...] the ark of the covenant moves on from the Philistines’ territory, but it never makes it back to its own home territory (see 1 Sam 6:9). Rather, it makes a stop first at Beth Shemesh, and finally comes to a 20-year sojourn in Kiriath Jearim, a territory of Judah [...].”

⁶¹ For a more thorough analysis of this phenomenon, see Adamczewski, *Samuel–Kings*, 27–29, 210–211.

4. The Issue of the Priority of the Book of Ruth against the Books of Samuel–Kings

The observation of the numerous parallelisms between the stories contained in the books of Ruth and Samuel–Kings provokes the question concerning possible literary influence and relative priority between these works.

4.1. Questions of Dating

The book of Ruth is dependent on the book of Genesis. This fact can be deduced, among others, from the remarks concerning Perez, a son of Judah and Tamar (Ruth 4:12, 18). The name of Perez has no deeper meaning in the story of Ruth. However, by illustrating semantically the idea of forcefully making a breach (Gen 38:29), it has an allusive function in the story of Genesis as a sequentially organized hypertextual reworking of Deuteronomy.⁶² Therefore, it was borrowed from the book of Genesis to the book of Ruth, and not vice versa.⁶³

The same can be said about the books of Samuel–Kings, in which the story of a Judahite leader's love affair with a woman named Tamar (תמר; 2 Sam 13:1–32) was borrowed from Gen 38:6–24.⁶⁴ The particular motif of a body-covering tunic that reached hands and feet (כתנת פסים) which was on a young person (כתנת הפסים אשר עלי*) (2 Sam 13:18–19), was likewise borrowed from Gen 37:3, 23.

Accordingly, both the book of Ruth and the books of Samuel–Kings are literarily dependent on the book of Genesis. If the latter work can relatively securely be dated to the end of the Persian period, c. 350–340 BC,⁶⁵ then both the book of Ruth and the books of Samuel–Kings should be dated to the early Hellenistic period, probably

⁶² For a comprehensive analysis of Genesis as a sequentially organized hypertextual reworking of Deuteronomy, see Adamczewski, *Genesis* (here: 182).

⁶³ Cf. Nielsen, *Ruth*, 15; Macios, *A bylo to w czasach*, 36, 232.

⁶⁴ Cf. Harvey, *Retelling the Torah*, 55–56; Adamczewski, *Samuel–Kings*, 99; Thambyrajah, “Israelite or Moabite?,” 47.

⁶⁵ For this dating of the book of Genesis, see Adamczewski, *Genesis*, 25–29; Adamczewski, “Abraham and Sanballat,” 23.

to the first half of the third century BC.⁶⁶ The use of the phrase $\eta\text{ש} + \eta\text{ש}$ in the meaning “take [not *carry away*: cf. Judg 21:23] a wife” (Ruth 1:4), which elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible can only be found in the late texts 2 Chr 11:21; 13:21; 24:3; Ezra 10:44 (cf. Ezra 9:2, 12; Neh 13:25; Sir Heb. A 7:23), also points in this direction.⁶⁷

4.2. Comparing the Supersessive Rhetoric in Ruth and in Samuel–Kings

As was argued above, both stories convey the supersessive idea of the transfer of the divine grace and election from the tribe of Ephraim to the tribe of Judah. In both stories, this transfer occurs through an intermediate narrative stage, which is located in a foreign land, and through intermediate narrative characters. However, the elaboration of these elements is different in both stories.

The intermediate, non-Israelite, narrative stage is located in the book of Ruth in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1–5).⁶⁸ In the books of Samuel–Kings, it is located in the land of the Philistines (1 Sam 4–5). The idea of the location of the intermediate exilic stage of the story in the land of Moab, as it is presented the book of Ruth, seems to be more primitive because it more closely resembles the story of the book of Deuteronomy with its intermediate exilic stage and the death of the former sinful generation likewise located in the land of Moab (Deut 1:5; 34:5).⁶⁹ By contrast, in the books of Samuel–Kings the description of the transfer of the divine grace and election through an intermediate, non-Israelite, in this case Philistine location is much more elaborate. It includes the narratively complicated story of the movements of the ark of the covenant from

⁶⁶ For this dating of the books of Samuel–Kings, see the discussion and arguments (e.g., Goliath’s armor resembling that of a Macedonian phalangist with a sarissa rather than a hoplite, the use of Late Biblical Hebrew phrases like $\eta\text{כ}\eta\text{ן ל}\eta\text{ב}$ and $\eta\text{ד ל}\eta\text{*}$ [in the meaning “until,” “as much as”]) presented in Adamczewski, *Samuel–Kings*, 23–26. Irmtraud Fischer (*Rut*, 91) dates the book of Ruth not earlier than to the second half of the 5th century.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hurvitz, *A Concise Lexicon*, 185–186.

⁶⁸ Cf. Gatti, “From Alien,” 5.

⁶⁹ Cf. de Villiers – le Roux, “The *Book of Ruth*,” 5.

the Ephraimite Shiloh to the Judean border town Kiriath-jearim through the land of the Philistines (1 Sam 4:1b–7:2).

The same can be said about the first intermediate character in the book of Ruth and in the books of Samuel–Kings. In both narratives, the first intermediate character is not an Israelite, it is pagan but becomes obedient to the God of (אלהי) Israel (Ruth 1:16; 1 Sam 6:3, 5), it is guided by Yahweh through its nature-based instinct, and it surprisingly but providentially comes from outside Israel to Judea. In the book of Ruth, the first intermediate character, namely that of the Moabite woman named Ruth, is a “round” character.⁷⁰ Ruth acts not merely with her feminine instinct (Ruth 3:7 etc.), but also has much-developed psychological traits, which greatly contribute to the beauty and didactic value of the story (Ruth 2:18 etc.). In the narrative of Samuel–Kings, the first intermediate characters are the Philistine priests, who surprisingly become obedient to the God of Israel,⁷¹ and the Philistine cows, which go to Beth-shemesh directed by Yahweh through their irrational animal instinct (1 Sam 6:12). In this case, the common motif is elaborated both in the book of Ruth and in the books of Samuel–Kings, but its use is more surprising in the latter work.

The second intermediate narrative character in both stories is a man, a relative (“brother”) of the more important male characters (Ruth 4:3), and he comes from inside Israel. He most likely represents the relatively insignificant tribe of the “brother” Benjamin, located between the tribes of the more distant “brothers” Ephraim and Judah. In the book of Ruth, the second intermediate narrative character has relatively primitive features. In this writing, the character most likely representing Benjamin is the enigmatic, apparently redundantly introduced character of the unnamed closest relative of the Ephraimite Elimelech (Ruth 3:12). This closest relative is weak and therefore simply renounces his claims to the material and spiritual heritage of the Ephraimites (Ruth 4:6–8). On the other hand, the motif

⁷⁰ Cf. Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 48.

⁷¹ The issue of the Philistine priests, similarly to Ruth (cf. Ruth 1:16), becoming consciously obedient to the God of (אלהי) Israel (1 Sam 6:2–6) plays an important role in the story of 1 Samuel. Cf. Sykora, “Only Be,” 719–720.

of an intermediate Benjaminite character is much more elaborated in the books of Samuel–Kings, which contain the narratively complex, fully developed story of the Benjaminite king Saul (1 Sam 9–31), acting as an intermediate character between the Ephraimite Samuel and the Judahite David.

These three common elements, which are more fully and more surprisingly developed in the books of Samuel–Kings than in the book of Ruth, show that the relatively simple story of the book of Ruth functioned as a preliminary rhetorical-ideological model for the much more complicated story of Samuel–Kings.

It should be noted that this hypothesis can also explain the strange remark concerning David as a son of the Ephrathite Jesse (1 Sam 17:12). This remark is surprising in the narrative of Samuel–Kings because the initial reference to Jesse the Bethlehemite (1 Sam 16:1) contains no information concerning his being an Ephrathite. Therefore, the reference to Jesse as an Ephrathite in 1 Sam 17:12 is quite surprising. However, the idea of Jesse being an Ephraimite/Ephrathite (אֶפְרַתִּי: 1 Sam 17:12) can be explained as borrowed from the book of Ruth, in which Jesse is presented as the son of Obed (Ruth 4:17, 22), who was in turn the son of the Ephrathite Boaz (Ruth 4:11–13, 21) and apparently the “son” of the Ephraimite (cf. Ruth 1:2) Naomi (Ruth 4:14–17).

The introduction of the otherwise unknown character of Obed in the genealogy of David in the book of Ruth (Ruth 4:17, 21–22) is rather artificial. This character is an element of a schematic, ten-generation genealogy of David as a heir of Judah (Ruth 4:18–22),⁷² which was composed with the use of elements borrowed from the books of Genesis (Perez, Hezron: Gen 46:12), Exodus–Numbers (Amminadab, Nahshon: Exod 6:23; Num 1:7; etc.), Isaiah (Jesse: Isa 11:1, 10), and probably freely invented characters (Ram, Salmon, Boaz, and Obed). Therefore, this elaborate, artificial genealogy of David in the book of Ruth, which is absent in the books of Samuel–Kings, does not contradict the hypothesis of the literary priority of the book of Ruth against the books of Samuel–Kings.

⁷² Cf. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 21–22, 280–281; Macios, *A bylo to w czasach*, 156, 366; Mathys, “Anmerkungen,” 366.

Conclusion

The book of Ruth contains a short story which seems to be mainly devoted to the problem of mixed marriages of Judeans with non-Judean women. However, a detailed analysis of the book of Ruth, especially compared to the supersessive rhetoric of the roughly contemporary books of Samuel–Kings, reveals that the issue of mixed marriages is only an instrument with which the main purpose of the book of Ruth is achieved. Many scholars have already argued that one of the main aims of the book of Ruth consists in legitimizing the Davidic dynasty in Judea.⁷³ However, they have not sufficiently analysed the departure point and the contrastive character of this legitimization.

The consciously ambiguous term אפרתיים (“Ephraimites” / “Ephrathites”) in Ruth 1:2, together with the likewise consciously contrasted names and features of the “weak” Ephraimites Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:2–5) and the “strong” Judahite Boaz (Ruth 2:1–4:13), by means of the rhetorical figure of synecdoche (*pars pro toto*) portray the tribe of Ephraim as weak and perishing, and the tribe of Judah as strong and taking over the material and spiritual heritage of the tribe of Ephraim. An intermediate stage in this passage of the divine grace and election from the tribe of Ephraim to the tribe of Judah is provided by the exilic land of Moab, by the non-male character of the Moabite woman named Ruth, and by the unnamed character of the closest but weak relative of the Ephraimites, who most likely represents the tribe of Benjamin.

Therefore, the rhetoric of the book of Ruth is highly supersessive. It delegitimizes the claims of the Ephraimites to domination in Israel, and against this background it promotes the Davidic dynasty in Judea. In this respect, it most probably served as a rhetorical-ideological model for the much more elaborate, likewise consciously Judean books of Samuel–Kings.

⁷³ Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 600, 615; Jackson, “The One Who Returned,” 444, 452, 454; Macios, *A było to w czasach*, 272–273.

Cel napisania Księgi Rut

Abstrakt: Wielu badaczy uważa, że Księga Rut, z jej opowiadaniem dotyczącym małżeństw mieszanych Judejczyków z kobietami moabickimi, świadomie sprzeciwia się ekskluzywistycznej retoryce Księg Ezdrasza–Nehemiasza. Jednakże szczegółowa analiza narracyjnej retoryki Księgi Rut, szczególności porównanej z supersesywną (zastępującą) retoryką mniej więcej współczesnych jej Księg Samuela–Królewskich, ujawnia, że głównym celem Księgi Rut było zdelegitymizowanie roszczeń szczepu Efraima do panowania w Izraelu, a na tym tle promocja szczepu Judy z jego Dawidową dynastią. Z tego powodu Księga Rut najprawdopodobniej służyła jako retoryczno-ideologiczny model dla dużo bardziej złożonej, podobnie świadomie judejskiej narracji Księg Samuela–Królewskich.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Rut, Księgi Samuela–Królewskie, Izrael, Samaria, Efraim, Judea

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