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## RUTH *QUOQUE* —A COQUETTE? (RUTH 4:5)<sup>1</sup>

Murray D. Gow

The recent publication of *The Revised English Bible*<sup>2</sup> and its choice of translation for Ruth 4:5 gives reason to reconsider this notable crux. REB gives the following rendering:

Boaz continued: 'On the day you take over the field from Naomi, I take over the widow, Ruth the Moabite, so as to perpetuate the name of the dead man on his holding.'

Discussion centres on two portions of the text in this verse: (i) the phrase **וּמֵאֵת רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה** ('and from Ruth the Moabite'), and (ii) the problem reading, Kethibh **קִנִּיתִי** ('I acquire')/Q<sup>e</sup>re, **קִנִּיתָ** (var. **קִנִּיתָהּ**) ('you acquire'). Considering first the Q<sup>e</sup>re **קִנִּיתָ** ('you acquire'), we note that the Hebrew syntax is problematical in that normally the verb **קָנָה** requires an object, which is lacking here. Attempts to resolve the problem abound and we shall now note some of the major proposals.<sup>3</sup>

### I. Alteration of the punctuation

One possible solution is to retain the Masoretic text, reading the Q<sup>e</sup>re, but changing the punctuation, so that the phrase 'wife

<sup>1</sup> This article is a reworking of part of my chapter on 'The Marriage of Ruth and Boaz' in a study of literary structure, theme and purpose in the Book of Ruth (to be published). Debated issues, such as whether or not the marriage of Ruth and Boaz is an instance of the levirate, are discussed in more detail there. I would like to thank Dr. Robert P. Gordon and Dr. Robert H. O'Connell for their assistance and comments on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, discussion in the following: W. Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohe Lied, Die Klagelieder* (Kommentar zum Alten Testament, XVII:1-3, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Gütersloh, Mohn, 1962) 58-69; D.R.G. Beattie, 'Kethibh and Qere in Ruth IV 5', *VT* 21 (1971) 490-494; 'The Book of Ruth as Evidence for Israelite Legal Practice', *VT* 24 (1974) 251-267; E.F. Campbell, *Ruth: a new translation with introduction, notes, and commentary* (The Anchor Bible; vol.7; Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1975) 146-147; J.M. Sasson, *Ruth: a new translation with a philological commentary and a formalist-folklorist interpretation* (The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 119-136; E.W. Davies, 'Ruth IV 5 and the Duties of the *Gō'ēl*', *VT* 33 (1981) 231-235. D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*:1: 134-135 (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1982).

of the deceased' becomes the object of קניית.<sup>4</sup> C.H.H. Wright mentions that one of his Mss, by placing a rebhia on המואביה, supports such a translation, but then comments, 'This affords a good sense, but I have not found it supported by any other Mss., and it has no support from any of the ancient versions.'<sup>5</sup> In agreement with Wright, we may note that the LXX, the most literal of the ancient versions of Ruth, clearly accords with the Masoretic punctuation here. Further, there is a certain clumsiness to this rendering, and an ambiguity concerning the reference of the phrase, 'wife of the deceased', as to whether it would refer to Ruth or Naomi.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Emendation of ומאת רות

We shall now consider a cluster of views which attempt to resolve the difficulty by variously emending ומאת רות on the basis of the Vulgate, *Ruth quoque Moabitidem...debes accipere*. All of these have the effect of changing את from the preposition into the accusative particle, hence we might translate:

Then Boaz said, 'On the day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, also Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the deceased, you acquire...'

The following suggestions have been made. (a) The first proposal, dating at least as early as the seventeenth century, is to delete the מ and read ומאת רות.<sup>7</sup> In support of this reading it has been suggested that the מ is the result of dittography, induced by the מ in the preceding name, נעמי.<sup>8</sup> (b) An alter-

<sup>4</sup> Accepted by the *NIV*, and the Jewish Publication Society, *Tanakh*; favoured also by J. Morison, *Ruth* (The Pulpit Commentary, London, 1886) 61.

<sup>5</sup> C.H.H. Wright, *The Book of Ruth in Hebrew* (London, 1864) 59.

<sup>6</sup> Some scholars do, of course, argue that the ambiguity is deliberate. For example, D. Daube, *Ancient Jewish Law: Three Inaugural Lectures* (Leiden, Brill, 1981) 40, suggests that Boaz 'formulates in such a way that the other one can envisage only marriage with Naomi. Literally, "the wife of the dead" may describe either her or Ruth'. The difficulty, however, with such interpretation is the phrase ומאת רות המואביה, and it is not surprising that attempts are then made to excise it. We shall refrain from surgical techniques until it be shown that the malady requires it.

<sup>7</sup> L. Cappellus, *Critica Sacra* (Paris, 1650) 362; cf. Barthelemy, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> So B.A. Levine, 'In Praise of the Israelite *Mišpāḥa*: Legal Themes in the Book of Ruth', in *The Quest For the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George*

native which has received more support, and which is favoured by BHK/BHS, is to read ג in place of ו so giving **גם את רות**.<sup>9</sup> (c) A similar reading **גם את רות** assumes the loss of ג in transmission. E.F. Campbell notes that 'the syntax here requires the presence of *we* (after the temporal expression "in the day of your buying")'.<sup>10</sup> Hence this reading may be preferred to (b) above.

Any one of these three options may be considered possible; we shall return later to the question of whether such emendation is justified. For the moment let it be noted that both the tradition of translation represented by RSV/NRSV/NASB/JB/NJB/NAB/NEB and the new approach of the REB depend on some such emendation, the former group then reading the Q<sup>e</sup>re, קניית, while the REB follows the K<sup>e</sup>thibh קניית.

### III. The K<sup>e</sup>thibh option.

The K<sup>e</sup>thibh has been defended in recent years by D.R.G. Beattie<sup>11</sup> and J.M. Sasson<sup>12</sup>. Both writers argue that Ruth had obtained from Boaz the previous night not just his agreement to act as redeemer, but also a commitment to marriage. Beattie interprets Rt 3:9-14 to imply that Boaz and Ruth had already consummated their union at the threshing floor, and so it would be inconceivable to find Boaz informing the kinsman of his duty to marry the woman with whom he had just slept.<sup>13</sup> Sasson, on the other hand, prefers to interpret the threshing floor scene as

*E. Mendenhall* edd., H.B. Huffmon, F.A. Spina, and A.R.W. Green (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1983) 99, who is a recent advocate of this emendation.

<sup>9</sup> Beattie, *VT* 21 (1971) 493 (note 2), says that Geiger, *ZDMG* XIV (1860) 743, was to first to propose this view. It is accepted by A.B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel* (Leipzig, 1914) vii: 28; H.H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and other Essays on the Old Testament* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1965) 193, n.1; Rudolph, *ibid.* 59; E. Würthwein, *Die Fünft Megilloth* (Handbuch zum Alten Testament, 18, 2nd ed., Tübingen, Mohr - Siebeck) 20.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, *Ruth* 146. This option is accepted by P. Joüon, *Ruth: commentaire philologique et exegetique* (Rome, Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1953) 83; G. Gerleman, *Ruth. Das Hohelied* (Biblischer Kommentar, 18, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1965) 35; and, tentatively, Sasson, *Ruth* 122.

<sup>11</sup> Beattie, 'Kethibh and Qere in Ruth IV 5', *VT* 21 (1971) 490-494; *idem*, 'The Book of Ruth as Evidence for Israelite Legal Practice', *VT* 24 (1974) 251-267.

<sup>12</sup> Sasson, *Ruth* 119-136.

<sup>13</sup> *VT* 21 (1971) 493.

the occasion of the betrothal of Ruth and Boaz.<sup>14</sup> Both writers see the K<sup>e</sup>thibh ('I acquire') as accounting better for the kinsman's sudden change of mind, for he realises that his ownership of the field will only be temporary and would later have to be ceded to the offspring of Boaz and Ruth.

The interpretation of the threshing floor scene I discuss in more detail elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Briefly, we may note that it is not immediately obvious from the text that Rt 3:9-14 describes either consummation or betrothal. Sasson himself notes, against Beattie, that unlike שכב ('to sleep, lie down'), the verb לון ('to lodge, pass the night') 'bears no sexual connotations'<sup>16</sup>. Neither, we might add, should the words מרגלתיו ותשכב ('and she lay at his feet') be considered as descriptive of sexual activity. In order to specify the sexual act, the verb שכב takes the prepositions עם or את ('with'). A clear statement of the marriage, its consummation and resulting progeny occurs at 4:13, *after* all the legal issues have been resolved.

Likewise, Sasson's view that Rt 3:9-14 describes the betrothal of Ruth and Boaz rests on several judgements that strain the interpretation of the text. The first of these is his translation of כי in אתה גאל כי (3:9) in a 'corroborative sense' to produce the rendering, 'you are indeed a redeemer'.<sup>17</sup> The context, however, surely demands that Ruth give a reason for her request, and the form of her answer definitely links the marriage request to the fact that Boaz is redeemer.<sup>18</sup> The second is Sasson's claim that in the expression, היטבת חסדך מן-הראשון האחרון ('your latter kindness is better than the former'), the 'latter kindness' refers to Ruth's praiseworthy attempt to find a redeemer for her mother-in-law, while the 'former' refers to her own less worthy attempt to find herself a husband.<sup>19</sup> In response, we observe that the plan to find Ruth a husband is Naomi's idea, and, in the context of the whole story, is hardly seen as 'self-serving'. Further, the similarity of

<sup>14</sup> Sasson, *Ruth* 91-95.

<sup>15</sup> See my *Structure, Theme and Purpose in the Book of Ruth* (to be published).

<sup>16</sup> Sasson, *Ruth* 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82; and see GKC § 148d, 159ff.

<sup>18</sup> As noted by Beattie, 'Redemption in Ruth, and related matters: a response to Jack M. Sasson', *JSOT*, 5 (1978) 65.

<sup>19</sup> Sasson, 'The Issue of *Ge'ullah* in *Ruth*', *JSOT* 5 (1978) 55-56.

function between Boaz' two speeches of praise (2:11-12 and 3:10-11) is a good reason for thinking that Boaz compares Ruth's former kindness in following Naomi to Bethlehem with her latter kindness in seeking marriage with a kinsman in preference to a younger man not connected with the family.

Now, if Sasson's interpretation of these two points in Rt 3:9-10 is shown to be false, then his third argument that the marriage and redemption are completely different issues in Rt 3:9-14 is likely to be falsified as a result. If we accept that Ruth's request for marriage (3:9) is based on the fact that Boaz is redeemer—which would be the natural way to understand the text—further, if we accept that Boaz' praise for Ruth's latter kindness refers to her loyalty to the family in seeking marriage with a kinsman, then we have no grounds for separating the marriage from the redemption custom. This would greatly weaken the case for the K<sup>e</sup>thibh in Rt 4:5.

So far we have paid no attention to the textual arguments in favour of the K<sup>e</sup>thibh. Beattie presents several arguments, some of which merit close attention. He suggests:

when a K<sup>e</sup>thibh and Q<sup>e</sup>re form represents, as this example does, two alternative readings, the reading to be preferred must be that which in the context gives the better sense. The correctness of such a selection should, moreover, be tested, where possible, by explaining why the variant reading which is not preferred, and is therefore to be considered erroneous, should have arisen.<sup>20</sup>

To these two principles I should wish to give measured assent, though not necessarily to the way Beattie interprets the evidence. He then goes on to apply his principles, suggesting that;

an original קָנִיתִי could easily have come to be read קָנִיתָ as the result of the assumption, based on Boaz's statement in vv.9f. that he has acquired the property of Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion and also Ruth, that there was an intrinsic connection between marriage to Ruth and redemption of the property. This assumption, coupled with the fact that in Ruth iii 3, 4 two verbs which, in the consonantal text end in *yod*, have been emended by a Qere to read as second person singular, resulted here in the emendation by a Qere to קָנִיתָ the fact that in the

<sup>20</sup> Beattie, *VT* 24 (1974) 263.

former cases the *yod* is the old feminine ending of the second person singular being apparently overlooked.<sup>21</sup>

This, positive part of his argument is rather tenuous. In the first place, it assumes what Beattie wishes to establish, *viz.* that there is no link between marriage and redemption in Ruth. Further, the arguments given for how the Qere may have arisen are a little too speculative to be convincing.

Beattie's negative arguments, on the other hand, carry more conviction. He argues that 'it is rather more difficult to explain how an original קְנִיָּתָּה could have come to be written קְנִיָּתִי<sup>22</sup> He is unconvinced by the explanations that have been given, e.g. that it resulted from a slip of the pen, or from a corruption of קְנִיָּתוֹ ('you have acquired *it*', i.e. the field),<sup>23</sup> or that the change may have occurred under the influence of verse 9.<sup>24</sup> One can concur with Beattie here. While the reason for a textual corruption may be difficult to discover in virtue of the fact that it is a mistake, nonetheless, it remains true that no convincing explanation has been given so far for the Q<sup>e</sup>re קְנִיָּתִי. We shall leave this issue temporarily to return to an earlier field of enquiry.

#### IV. ומאת רות again

Much of the discussion of Rt 4:5 takes it for granted that ומאת רות must be emended to make sense of the text. This, I shall argue, is a gratuitous assumption, and one which has led to a defective understanding of this text. First let us consider the textual and versional evidence.

There is in fact no textual evidence to support any of the proposals וּמִיָּד רֹת / גַּם אֶת / וְאֶת / וְאֶת. The variant וּמִיָּד רֹת ('and from the hand of Ruth') appears in two late Mss,<sup>25</sup> but this most

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-264.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>23</sup> So C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (Edinburgh, 1887) 488; this is followed more recently by E. Lipiriski, 'Le mariage de Ruth', *VT* 26 (1976) 127, n. 6.

<sup>24</sup> So Rudolph, *Ruth* 59.

<sup>25</sup> See B. Kennicott, ed., *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum: cum Variis Lectionibus* (Oxford, 1780) *ad loc.*; also Wright, *The Book of Ruth in Hebrew* 58-59.

likely under the influence of **נעמי מיד** earlier in the verse, or perhaps under the influence of the Targum, **ומן ידא דרות**

The versional evidence also weighs heavily in favour of the MT. The LXX reading **καὶ παρὰ Ρουθ** clearly represents **רות ומאת רות**. It has been suggested that the LXX then equivocates, offering a double translation in its reading **καὶ αὐτήν κτήσασθαί σε δεῖ**, this representing, perhaps, one of the three emendations listed in my previous paragraph.<sup>26</sup> This, I suggest, is to misunderstand the significance of the LXX, and illustrates how thoroughly the standard interpretation of the Vulg. *Ruth quoque...* has beguiled the discussion of this text. I shall offer an alternative explanation of the LXX reading in section V.

The reading of the Targum, **ומן ידא דרות** may likewise be adduced in support of **ומאת רות**. This rendering reflects the lack of the particle **את** ('with') in Aramaic, and so the Targum has taken its cue from the earlier **מיד נאמי** in a manner typical of Targumic translational method.

The Vulgate, *Quando emeris agrum de manu mulieris, Ruth quoque Moabitidem, quae uxor defuncti fuit, debes accipere...* is the major witness cited in support of emendation. However, while emendation might ease the problem of supplying an object for **קניית**, care should be taken when assessing the significance of the Vulgate here. First, it should be noted that the Vulgate can hardly be said to give a literal translation of the verse. To illustrate my point, the reader may attempt to put the Hebrew text out of his/her mind and attempt to establish the whole text of Rt 4:5 by retroversion from the Vulgate. For a similar exercise in futility the same might be attempted with the REB. If the reader was then (rightly) to object, 'But, the REB is heir to a whole tradition of scholarly examination of the text, as well as study of the ancient

<sup>26</sup> So D.A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: with Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, New Jersey, Mack, 1974) 225, n. 54: 'LXX is unhelpful, having combined both possibilities in its translation'. Similarly, R. Thornhill, *VT* 3 (1953) 244; L.P. Smith, *Introduction and Exegesis of the Book of Ruth* (Interpreter's Bible, Nashville, Abingdon, 1953) 2: 848. On the difficulties involved in determining 'double translations', see, for instance, Z. Talshir, 'Double Translations in the LXX' in C.E. Cox (ed.) *VI Congress of the International Organisation for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Jerusalem 1986*, SCS Series SBL no. 23; (Atlanta, SBL, 1987) 21-63.

versions', then a similar point can be made with respect to the Vulgate. We should also bear in mind that although the Vulgate represents an attempt to work from the Hebrew, it did have a substantial tradition of translation preceding it, in both the Greek and earlier Latin versions. Indeed, it is worth observing that *quoque* may well represent the καὶ (taken to mean 'also') in the LXX clause καὶ αὐτήν κτήσασθαί σε δεῖ. Hence, I conclude that the textual and versional evidence for emendation is slim if not non-existent. If it was not for the pressure to find an object for קניית then it is doubtful that anyone would ever have thought to emend וראת ומאת.

If we do accept וראת ומאת then we discover that Boaz' challenge to the kinsman is formulated with more precision than has normally been recognized. In Hebrew the term hand (יד) is used figuratively for economic possession or control.<sup>27</sup> ביד may indicate possession or power over; מיד may refer to the giving up of ownership. The field is thus said to be acquired from the hand (מיד) of Naomi, signifying that she is the one authorizing the transaction and giving up possession, but the elaboration וראת ומאת signifies that Ruth also has a *legal interest* in the transaction.<sup>28</sup> Boaz is careful to explain why Ruth the Moabitess is linked with this transaction: it is because she is אשת המת ('the wife of the deceased'). On this interpretation, Boaz' words are seen to be very carefully chosen. Up to this point he has spoken only of Elimelech and Naomi in relation to the field, but now in verse 5 he points out that Ruth also is an interested party, because she is the wife of the deceased, and because of this she claims the performance of the levirate linked with the redemption of the field.<sup>29</sup> We have not yet resolved, however, the problem of the K<sup>e</sup>thibh/Q<sup>e</sup>re.

<sup>27</sup> cf. *TDOT* V: 407-410.

<sup>28</sup> Similarly Barthelemy, ed., *Critique textuelle*, I: 135. If Boaz' words are nuanced in this way, then this would count against the view of F.I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1970) 48 and 124 n.13, who postulates an enclitic mem after the conjunction *waw* in וראת, in which case the clause would be translated virtually as if it read וראת. Campbell, *Ruth*, 146, tentatively favours this theory, but we should note the provisional character of the general theory of enclitic *mem*. Inasmuch as the term מאת has a legal significance particularly appropriate to this context it is better to grant it this meaning.

<sup>29</sup> See note 1 above.



### V. What and whence the Q<sup>e</sup>re?

In section III we argued against the acceptance of the K<sup>e</sup>thibh, but did not resolve the problems associated with the Q<sup>e</sup>re. We now turn to look for a solution that makes sense while retaining ומאת רות.

Three proposals may be discounted. (a) C.F. Keil suggested that the K<sup>e</sup>thibh קניתי arose as a corruption of קניתו.<sup>30</sup> Such a corruption is certainly possible but the reading would not give particularly good sense and the reference to Ruth would serve little purpose. Moreover, lack of textual evidence militates against this proposal. (b) The attempt by T.C. Vriezen to derive the Kethibh קניתי from the verb קַנֵּא is even less convincing and has not commended itself to scholars.<sup>31</sup> (c) In part III we discussed Beattie's negative arguments against the Q<sup>e</sup>re and found them fairly convincing. We might add that קניית simply does not make sense of its context, especially if we retain ומאת רות earlier.

There is one further option to explore. I would offer the suggestion that the most important clues to determining the text are the reading of the LXX and the variant reading of the Q<sup>e</sup>re קנייתה.<sup>32</sup> Although this is a minority variant, it should be given serious consideration because it is easier to explain its omission than its inclusion. Now קנייתה, could merely be read as an orthographic variant, but the LXX is best interpreted as having read the ה as the feminine pronominal suffix.<sup>33</sup> The LXX Kat αὐτήν κατήσασθαί σε δεῖ ('you must also acquire her') is a fair presentation of קנייתה ('you acquire her'), especially if καὶ is given the meaning 'also'.

<sup>30</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *ibid.*, 488.

<sup>31</sup> T.C. Vriezen, 'Two Old Cruces', *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 5 (1948) 80-88.

<sup>32</sup> So the Masora of BHK/BHS based on the Leningrad text. BHS mentions that a few Mss have קנייתה. See also Kennicott, *ad loc.*, and Wright, *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *ibid.*, 59-60, discusses this possibility but rejects it. He thinks, however, that the LXX read וקנייתה. This is hardly necessary, for the LXX not infrequently adds a καὶ where there is no conjunction in the original, and its use here represents an attempt to make the sense explicit. It is worth noting that if the LXX was attempting to represent גם את, then on the balance of probabilities, we might have expected καὶ γε to appear here, in accordance with its majority practice elsewhere in Ruth.

This reading has a number of clear advantages. First, as a Q<sup>e</sup>re variant, it has modest Hebrew Ms support, and it accounts best for the reading of the LXX. What is more, it supplies an object for the verb קנה, and so makes unnecessary any thought of emendation earlier in the verse. It is also possible, as we suggested earlier, that the LXX καὶ αὐτήν has influenced the Vulgate reading *Ruth quoque*. Earlier we noted Beattie's objection to the acceptance of the Q<sup>e</sup>re when he pointed out that it was difficult to explain how an original קנית could have been corrupted to קניתי. His arguments carry weight. If, however, the text was originally קניתה then it is a different matter, as a misreading of *hē* for *yôd* in the older script is a genuine possibility.<sup>34</sup> Once the first person form קניתי found its way into the text, the tendency might well have been to correct it by simply reading the second person קנית, rather than the second person plus 3f. sg. suffix, קניתה. If this reading is accepted then we may offer a translation such as the following:

Then Boaz said, 'On the day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, you acquire her in order to raise up the name of the deceased upon his inheritance.'

It is surprising that this solution has not received more exploration in the past. Could it be that the seductive allure of a certain interpretation of the reading *Ruth quoque* has created a mindset which has found it difficult to see other possibilities?

Two points may be made in conclusion. (a) The reading I have proposed reduces the need for emendation, while at the same time showing that Boaz' speech has more legal precision than is commonly recognized. The relationship of the two women to the transaction is formulated with care so as to clarify Ruth's status. Not only does Boaz link the redemption of the field with marriage to Ruth; he also gives the reason for making this link, *viz.*, that she is 'the wife of the deceased'. (b) The tradition that interprets the marriage of Ruth and Boaz as non-leviratic may, in part, be based on a textual corruption.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, R.L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988) 59, n. 40, although Hubbard does not work through the possible implications of this conjecture.