

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LITERARY STRUCTURE FOR THE TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

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During recent years scholars have become increasingly aware of the existence of deliberate literary structure in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> This structure has undoubted implications for the way a translation is laid out and paragraphed. An awareness of this may be seen in the *Translator's Handbook on the Book of Amos*,<sup>2</sup> but the earlier *Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth*,<sup>3</sup> although a most useful aid to the translator, fails to show the significance of structure for setting out a translation. The handbook on Ruth tends to divide the text on thematic considerations and as a result it encounters difficulties trying to explain some of the repetitive elements in Ruth which are in fact devices for showing structure. The following study concentrates on formal rather than thematic indicators in determining the structure of the Book of Ruth.<sup>4</sup> We shall set out to show that the story consists of four episodes, corresponding closely to the chapter divisions, and each of which divides into three sections.<sup>5</sup>

### EPISODE I (Ruth 1.1–22a)

Most scholars see vv. 1–5 as an introductory section emphasizing the “emptiness” theme, but a closer look at the formal structure of this chapter shows that it is better divided thus: 1–7b, 7c–19a, 19b–22a.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, S. Bar-Efrat, “Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative”, *Vetus Testamentum* XXX (1980), 154–173; H. van Dyke Parunak, “Oral Type-setting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure”, *Biblica* 62 (1981), 153–168; and “Some Axioms for Literary Architecture”, *Semiotics* 8 (1982), 1–16, J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler, eds., *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, Pittsburgh, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Jan de Waard and William A. Smalley, UBS 1979.

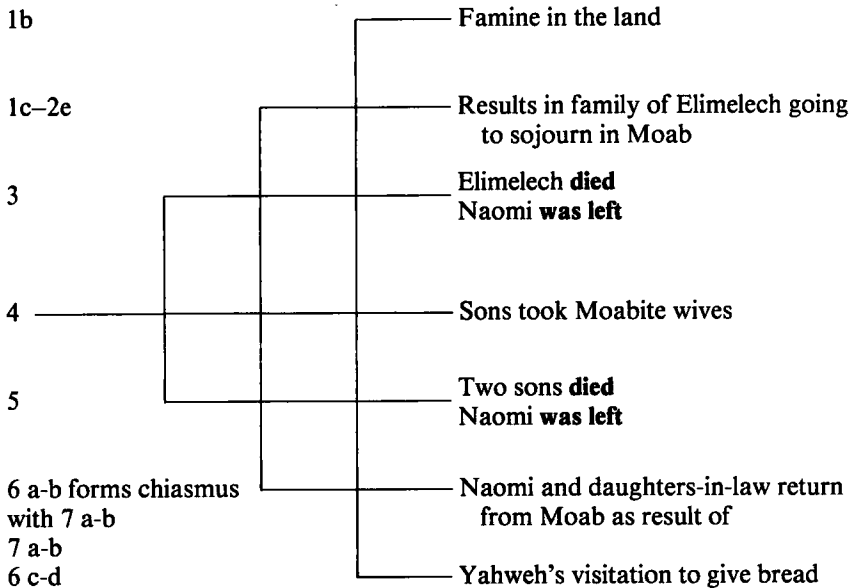
<sup>3</sup> Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, UBS 1973.

<sup>4</sup> The following studies may be noted. S. Bertman, “Symmetrical Design in the Book of Ruth”, *JBL* 84 (1965), 165–168; E. F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, (The Anchor Bible; vol. 7), Garden City, NY., 1975, esp. pp. 10–18; Barbara Green, *A Study of Field and Seed Symbolism in the Biblical Story of Ruth*, PhD dissertation, G.T.U., Berkeley, 1980, esp. pp. 33–44; B. Porten, “The Scroll of Ruth: a Rhetorical Study”, *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies* VII (1978), 23–49; Y. T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* ed. John W. Welch, Hildesheim, 1981, esp. pp. 71–76; B. Rebera, *The Book of Ruth: Dialogue and Narrative—The Function and Integration of the Two Modes in an Ancient Hebrew Story*, PhD thesis, Macquarrie University, 1981; K. K. Sacon, “The Book of Ruth—Its Literary Structure and Theme”, *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute (AJBI)* 4 (1978), 3–22; Phyllis Triple, *God and The Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia, 1978, pp. 167–199; and Hagia H. Witzernath, *Das Buch Rut: Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung*, Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 40, Munich, 1975, whose morphematic classification of the text I have followed in verse numbering. See also my *Structure, Theme and Purpose in the Book of Ruth*, (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, forthcoming) which gives more sustained treatment of the relationship between structure and theme.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that our present chapter and verse divisions, which frequently divide the text in inappropriate places, are a late development in the history of the text. Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson (ed.) *The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions*, Oxford, 1954, pp. 119, 184–185.

<sup>6</sup> So E. Würthwein, *Ruth*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament, 18, Tübingen, 1969, pp., 8–12, and K. K. Sacon, *AJBI* 4 (1978), 4–7.

**Section 1 (vv. 1–7b)** is a balanced symmetrical unit which exhibits the following structure:<sup>7</sup>



When it is seen that Section 1 ends at v. 7b, it will be noted that this gives a significant change of emphasis to this introduction. It is true that there is an emphasis on Naomi's emptiness and her cruel circumstances are portrayed with stark and poignant clarity. Nevertheless, the section ends with a counter-note describing Yahweh's providential restoration of crops in Judah, which prompts Naomi's decision to return home. Section 1 thus introduces the **return** motif which dominates the rest of Episode I. What is more, this introduction also describes the marriage of Naomi's sons to Orpah and Ruth. Despite the subsequent death of the lads, the central place given to these girls may be a deliberate clue to their future importance for the story.

The chiasmic structure of vv. 6–7b serves to bring this first section to a close, as well as stressing the divine providence, and also emphasizing that Naomi is not returning alone.

A And she arose, **she and her daughters-in-law**

B and **returned from the land of Moab.**

For she had heard in the land of Moab,  
that Yahweh had visited His people to give them bread.

B<sup>1</sup> So **she went out from the place where she had been**

A<sup>1</sup> and **her two daughters-in-law with her.**

The recognition of the presence of chiasmus here explains the repetition in the Hebrew text, serving as it does to show the conclusion of this section, as well as providing emphasis, but the translator is left with the problem of representing this in a receptor language that lacks such literary devices.

<sup>7</sup> Modified slightly from that of Sacon, *AJBI* 4 (1978), p. 4.

**Section 2 (vv. 7c–19a)** The previous section ended with the double statement that Naomi was returning with her daughters-in-law and this next section is enclosed by a narrative bracket continuing the theme of *return*.

7c And **they went** on the way **to return** to the land of Judah

19a And **they went**, the two of them, until **they came** to Bethlehem.

The following outline helps to show the structure of this section:

7c **Narrative frame**—"They went . . . Judah"

8–9b **Speech**—Naomi { Go—**return**  
Prayer for *hesed* and  
**rest**—in house of husband

9c-e **Narrative transition** { She **kissed** them  
They **lifted voices** and **wept**

10–13 **Dialogue** { Ruth and Orpah  
—express intent to **return** with Naomi  
Naomi—**Return** my daughters  
no more sons  
**Return** my daughters, go  
too old—hope is vain  
No my daughters  
Yahweh against her.

14 **Narrative transition** { They **lifted voices** and **wept** again  
Orpah **kissed** her mother-in-law  
But Ruth clung to her

15–18 **Dialogue** { Naomi—**return** after your sister-in-law  
Ruth—identification with Naomi and her God  
plus oath  
Naomi—non-speech (cessation of dialogue)

19a **Narrative frame**—"They went . . . Bethlehem"

Looking at one or two features within this section we observe that Naomi's second speech (vv. 11–13) may be laid out as follows:<sup>8</sup>

11a. b But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters!

c Why go with me?

d Have I yet **sons** in my womb

e that they might become for you **husbands**?

12a. b Return, my daughters, go!

c For I am too old to have a **husband**

<sup>8</sup> Closely following Porten, *Gratz* VII (1978), 27–28. Porten lays out the text showing the vertical correspondence in Hebrew of the words at both the beginning and the end of the lines.

- 12d. e For were I to say, 'I have hope.'  
 f Further, were I to be this night to a **man**,  
 g and further were I to bear **sons**,  
 13a. b for them, would you wait until they matured?  
 c For them would you refrain from having a **husband**?  
 d No, my daughters!  
 e For my lot is far more bitter than yours.  
 f For gone out against me is the hand of Yahweh."

This rather too literal translation indicates Naomi's concern, throughout the speech, with the loss of males in her life, and hence her loss of hope.

Ruth's countering speech is the high point of this section. The diagram shows its symmetrical pattern. Ruth's speech strongly affirms her loyalty to Naomi, while the central place given to her **confession**, emphasizes her allegiance to the people and God of Israel.

Ruth prohibits	Entreat me not to forsake you to return from following you.
further dissuasion	
Affirmation of	For where you go, I will go and where you lodge, I will lodge.
loyalty to Naomi in life	
Central	Your people (shall be) my people and your God (shall be) my God
Confession	
And in death	Where you die, I will die and there I shall be buried.
Confirmed with oath	Thus may Yahweh do to me and thus may He add if even death separate me from you.
thus silencing Naomi	

**Section 3 (vv. 19b–22a)** We shall not treat this section here,<sup>9</sup> except to note that it is also bound by two narrative statements which continue to emphasize the dominant theme of *return* that runs through the first episode. The final sentence draws the first episode to a close by highlighting the most significant event of this whole chapter for the ongoing story.

19b And when they *came* to Bethlehem . . .

22a So Naomi *returned* and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab.

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed treatment, see my *Structure, Theme and Purpose in the Book of Ruth*, ad loc.

### EPISODES II and III (1.22b–2.23a and 2.23b–3:18)

Like episodes I and IV, episodes II and III each contain three sections. However, unlike episodes I and IV, episodes II and III possess an overall symmetry, both episodes building up to, and away from, a central climax. It may be observed that 1.22b and 2.23a form a bracket enclosing episode II.

1.22b Now they came<sup>10</sup> to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest

2.23a And she remained with Boaz' girls to glean until the end of the barley and wheat harvest.

Further, there are strong grounds for seeing 2.23b, "And she stayed with her mother-in-law", as a narrative introduction to episode III. The episode then concludes at 3.18, with Naomi's advice, "Sit tight my daughter . . .", containing a repetition of the verb *yāšab*, to sit/dwell.<sup>11</sup> As we have already mentioned, both chapters II and III build up to and away from a central climax. In both cases this climax consists of a speech by Boaz **praising** Ruth for her behaviour and **praying** for her blessing. The central place given to these speeches highlights their importance for the intention of the Book of Ruth.

The following diagrams show the symmetrical structure of these two chapters. The brackets at the right indicate the demarcation of the individual sections. In chapter 2 it is fairly clear that section 4 ends at v. 3. This is indicated by the chiasmic reference to "a man . . . of *the clan of Elimelech* whose name was **Boaz**", closed at verse 3 by the repetition of "**Boaz** who came from *the clan of Elimelech*". This double reference to Boaz enclosed a dialogue in which Ruth states her intention to glean after **someone in whose eyes she will find favour**, thus raising the reader's expectation that Boaz may chance to be that one (see fig. 1).

Although Section 5 patently begins at 2.4, it is not quite so clear where it ends. In the diagram I have seen Section 6 beginning with 18c, **And her mother-in-law saw . . .**,<sup>12</sup> but there are several other genuine possibilities. Section 6 may equally well begin at the start of v. 18.<sup>13</sup> This would be a perfectly plausible opening to the section and its plausibility is enhanced when it is observed that the first section of this episode opens with Naomi and Ruth **coming to Bethlehem** (1.22b). The second section then opens with Boaz **coming from Bethlehem** (2.4). It would therefore complete the pattern to have the final section of this episode opening with Ruth **coming to the city** (ie. Bethlehem). There is one other possibility. Y. T. Radday<sup>14</sup> suggests, **And it came to an ephah of barley** (17c) as the start of the final section in this episode. This presumably takes the *wayēhi*, (often a narrative opener) to indicate the start of a new section, and it would also have the function of drawing attention to the

<sup>10</sup> The use of the Hebrew perfect, plus the correspondence with 2.23a, is evidence for taking 1.22b as the beginning of episode II.

<sup>11</sup> So Porten, *Gratz* VII (1978) p. 36, Sacon, *AJBI* 4 (1978) p. 10, and Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 57. The change of subject, Naomi instead of Ruth, may favour this division.

<sup>12</sup> So for example, H. Gunkel, "Ruth" in *Reden und Aufsätze*, 1913, p. 74 and followed by the commentaries of W. Rudolph, and E. Würthwein.

<sup>13</sup> *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> So R. Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica* (all editions).

*Outline of Chapter 2*

1.22b	Outer narrative frame: "And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."	At Home	Section 4
2.1-3 A	Mention of Boaz' relationship. Dialogue—Ruth's plan, Naomi's advice. Ruth journeys and happens to come to the field of Boaz.		
2.4-7 B	Arrival of Boaz from Bethelam. Dialogue with servants: question about Ruth, her request to glean, favourable comment, has toiled from morning till now.	In the Harvest Field	Section 5
2.8-10b C	Boaz addresses Ruth—permission to glean with his workers, protection and drink provided when thirsty. She falls to ground.		
2.10 c-e D	Ruth's response—gratitude, asks reason for favour.		
2.11-12 X	Boaz' answer. <b>Praise</b> —he has heard of all that she has done for her mother-in-law. <b>Prayer</b> —Yahweh to reward.		
2.13 D'	Ruth's response—gratitude, anticipates continued favour.		
2.14-15a C'	Boaz addresses Ruth—invitation to join group at mealtime, he serves her, she is satisfied and arises to glean.	At Home	Section 6
2.15b-18b B'	Boaz commands workers—let her glean even among sheaves and don't bother her, leave extra and don't rebuke her. Request thus granted with liberality. (Gleaned till evening, beat out what she gleaned, came to ephah of barley, she picked up and came to the city.) <sup>15</sup>		
2.18c-22 A'	Mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned—leftovers. Blesses benefactor, Boaz identified—blessed—relationship elaborated. Advice from Naomi.		
2.23	Outer narrative frame: "And she cleaved to Boaz' maidens until the end of the barley and wheat harvest."		

Fig. 1

Symmetrical composition can be clearly seen, both in the change of speakers and the content of the speeches. It also appears in the repetition of narrative elements.

considerable amount of grain gleaned by Ruth, which then becomes the cause of Naomi's astonishment in the following section. None of these options has a clear advantage, but I suggest that it may be safest for the translator to start Section 6 at the beginning of verse 18.

It may be observed that there are two possible schemes for dividing Chapter 3 into sections (see outline). Of the two, I prefer the temporal division, evening—midnight—dawn, in that both verses 8 and 14b begin with standard narrative openers (*wayehi*—"and it came to pass", and *wattâqom*—"and she arose"). (See Fig. 2)

<sup>15</sup> There are several possible cut-off points within the material in parenthesis.

Outline of Chapter 3<sup>16</sup>

1-4 A	Naomi's plan to get Boaz and Ruth together— <b>her advice</b> on execution—Dress up . . . uncover feet—he will tell what to do.	Ruth and Naomi: At Home	At Evening
5 B	And she said, "All that you say unto me, I will do."		
6 C	And she went down to the threshing floor and did just as commanded by her mother-in-law.		
7a-d D	And Boaz ate and drank and in good heart <b>came</b> to lie down beside the grain heap.		
7e-g E	And she came <b>quietly</b> , uncovered his feet and <i>lay down</i> .		
8 F	And it came to pass at <b>midnight</b> he found a woman <b>lying at his feet</b> .	Ruth and Boaz:	At Midnight
9 G	He asks her <b>identity</b> . She identifies herself and <b>requests marriage identifying him as a redeemer</b> .		
10-11 H	He <b>praises</b> her again, cf. 2.11-12. He <b>blesses</b> her by LORD for this <b>latter kindness</b> . He will do <b>all that she wishes</b> , for all the people know that she is a worthy woman.		
12-13 G'	He <b>admits his identity as a redeemer</b> , but there is one closer. She is to stay the night, if the redeemer will redeem, fine, but otherwise Boaz will redeem. "Lie down until the morning."		
14a F'	So she <b>lay at his feet</b> until the morning.		
14b-f E'	And she <b>arose before one could be recognized</b> , for he said, "Let it not be known . . ."		
15 D'	He commands her to bring shawl which he fills with <b>six measures</b> of barley. He set it upon her and she <b>came</b> to the city.		
16a C'	And she <b>came</b> to her <b>mother-in-law</b> .	Naomi and Ruth: At Home	At Dawn
16b-d B'	Naomi asks her <b>identity</b> . Ruth tells her <b>all that the man had done</b>		
17-18 A'	Ruth produces six measures of barley and reports that Boaz had said she must not return empty to her mother-in-law. <b>Naomi gives advice</b> —"wait, for the man will not rest till he has completed the matter today.		

Fig. 2

<sup>16</sup> I have divided up this chapter somewhat more than Chapter Two, in order to show the correspondence more clearly. It might, however, be more appropriate to combine A-B and B'-A' or A-B-C and C'-B'-A' etc. For somewhat different approaches to the analysis of the structure of this chapter see B. Porten, *Gratz* 7 pp. 38-42, Y. T. Radday in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, pp. 73-74, and K. K. Sacon, *AJBI* 4 (1978), pp. 11-15.

### EPISODE IV (4: 1–22)

Most texts and translations divide Ruth 4 into three main sections consisting of vv. 1–12, 13–17 and 18–22.<sup>17</sup> However, I would suggest the following alternative schema: vv. 1–11b, 11c–17 and 18–22, based on the evidence of the LXX and also on structural grounds. The LXX separates the marriage blessing of 4: 11–12 from the witnessing function of the people. A translation of the Hebrew text of verse 11 reads as follows:

And all the people who were in the gate, and the elders said, 'We are witnesses. May Yahweh make . . .'

However, the LXX would give the following translation:

And all the people who were in the gate said, 'We are witnesses'.  
And the elders said, 'May the Lord make . . .'

The Jerusalem Bible has followed the LXX<sup>18</sup> at verse 11, but has failed to note the significance of this for the division of the material in this chapter. The LXX, which usually translates verb clauses in Ruth with slavish literalness, suggests a Hebrew text here without the *waw* consecutive. If it does translate a text that had the perfect, this would be a likely indication that the marriage blessing begins a new section.<sup>19</sup> If we follow the MT, then we would have a division on the basis of locale: all the events at the gate constituting one section, with the marriage and subsequent events forming the following section, but if we follow the LXX, then the legal case comprises a section by itself, while the blessing—marriage—birth complex forms the subsequent section. Such a division gives a better structural balance to the material of Ch.4.

**Section 10 (4.1–11b)** It may be seen that Section 10 is structured symmetrically around verse 5 which is the crucial verse for this passage. In verse 5 Boaz links the redemption of the field and the necessity to marry Ruth, and it is this which throws the whole transaction in a different light. I suggest that verse 7 should be seen as a historical gloss which has been added at a later time to explain a custom which has fallen into disuse, but which needed an explanation when the book was first written. Although necessary for our understanding of the custom, we shall omit it from the following diagram to better observe the structure of this section (Fig. 3).

<sup>17</sup> So also A. B. Erlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* VII, p. 28, and P. Joüon, *Ruth: commentaire philologique et exégétique*, Rome 1953, p. 89. Contra E. F. Campbell, *Ruth* p. 152. See my *Structure, Theme and Purpose* Ch. 4, for fuller argumentation. Sacon, *AJBI* 4 (1978), 15–17 also separates the marriage blessing from the previous section, but without reference to the evidence of the LXX. It might be noted that the apparatus of BK 1 and 2 recognizes that the LXX indicates the Hebrew perfect, contra BK 3 and subsequent editions.

<sup>18</sup> It should be observed that the LXX slavishly follows Hebrew word order elsewhere in the Book of Ruth when representing verb clauses, usually, of course, indicating the *waw* consecutive, but at 1: 14, 22b and 4: 1, it correctly indicates the perfect. The fact that the very literal LXX here at 4: 11 differs from the MT is evidence that it translates a genuine Hebrew Vorlage which contained the perfect.

<sup>19</sup> On this topic see S. Bar-Efrat, *VT* 30 (1980), 156–157, S. Bertman, *JBL* 84 (1965), 165–168, B. Porten, *Gratz* 7 (1978), 23, and my *Structure, Theme and Purpose* ad loc.



Section 10 (1–11b) *The legal case*

- 1–2 **A** **Boaz**—at the gate—summons the *gō'ēl* (redeeming kinsman) and sets up a court to hear the case.
- 3 **B** **Boaz to Gō'ēl**—raises the matter of the *field* of **Elimelech** which Naomi offers/ed for sale.
- 4a-c **C** **Boaz**—“And I said I would uncover your ear saying, ‘Buy before those seated and before the elders of my people.’”
- 4d-l **D** Speech concerning *redemption*—Boaz gives the *gō'ēl* first option to redeem, otherwise Boaz is prepared to redeem..The *gō'ēl* takes his option.
- 5 **E** **Boaz**—In addition to *buying* the *field from the hand of Naomi*, Ruth is also to be *married*, to *establish* the *name* of the dead upon his inheritance.
- 6 **D'** Speech concerning *redemption*—*gō'ēl* relinquishes his right of redemption in favour of Boaz, lest he impairs his own inheritance.
- 8 **C'** **Gō'ēl** to Boaz—“ ‘Buy for yourself’, and he drew off his sandal.”
- 9–10 **B'** **Boaz**—again raises matter of *Elimelech's property* (plus Chilion and Mahlon)—*from the hand of Naomi*: also *Ruth* whom he will *marry* to *establish* the name of the dead on his inheritance. People and elders called to be witnesses.
- 11a-b **A'** **People at the gate** acknowledge they are witnesses. (Case concluded.)

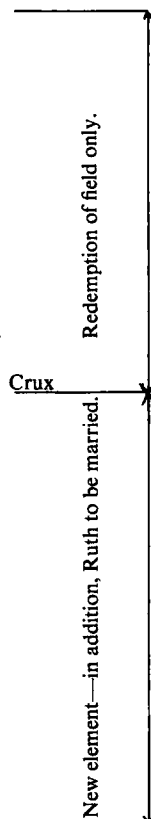


Fig. 3

**Section 11 (4.11c–17)** This section consists of the following elements: Blessing—Narrative—Blessing—Narrative—Fulfilment of blessings seen in naming. It may be seen that the central section of this *dénouement* also contains praise for Ruth, so we should recognize that this book gives special emphasis to her worth. It is pertinent to observe that the prayers and blessings of vv. 11–12 and 14–15 receive their fulfilment in the birth of a son, and greater fulfilment in the advent of David.

**Section 11 (11c–17) *Dénouement***

- 11c–12 **The elders** give the marriage blessing  
 “May *Yahweh* make the woman who is coming into *your house*  
 Like Rachel and Leah who together built the *house of Israel*  
 May you do worthily (show fertility?) in Ephrathah  
 And bestow a name in Bethlehem  
 And may *your house* be like the *house of Perez* whom Tamar  
 bore to Judah  
 From the seed that *Yahweh* will give you from this *young woman*”

13                   **Narrative** “And Boaz *took* Ruth, and she *became* his  
B                   wife, and he went in to her, and Yahweh gave her conception  
and she bore a son.”

14–15               **The women**—blessing and evaluation  
C                   “Blessed be Yahweh, who has not left you  
                          without a redeemer this day  
                          May his name be celebrated in Israel  
                          And he will restore your soul and nourish  
                          your old age  
                          For your daughter-in-law who loves you  
                          has borne him  
                          She is better to you than seven sons”

16                   **Narrative** “And Naomi *took* the child and laid him  
B<sup>1</sup>                  in her bosom and *became* his nurse.”

17                   **The neighbouring women** bestow the name saying  
A<sup>1</sup>                  “ ‘A son is born to Naomi’  
                          And they called his name Obed  
                          He was the father of Jesse, the father of *David*.”

### **The Overall Structure of the Book of Ruth<sup>20</sup>**

For obvious reasons we have no comment on the internal structure of Section 12 (the genealogy), but it is worth pointing out that this section is included as part of the overall structure of the Book of Ruth. The total structure of the twelve sections may be represented thus: ABC—DEF—D'E'F'—B'C'A'.<sup>21</sup> Chapters 1 and 4, and 2 and 3 have corresponding elements. So, for example, Section B (1.7c–19a) describes Ruth's loyalty to Naomi, contrasted by Orpah's decision to return to her own people, while Section B' (4.1–11b) records Boaz' generous acceptance of responsibility for the redemption and levirate marriage, contrasted with the near kinsman's self serving rejection of this responsibility. Then again we may observe that Section C (19b–22a) describes Naomi's accusation, witnessed by the women, that Yahweh has brought her back empty. Section C' (4.11c–17) sees her restoration, with the women witnessing to her of Yahweh's gracious provision of a redeemer.

### **Concluding Remarks on Layout and Thematic Section Headings.**

The translator may find it difficult to reproduce literary features in a language that lacks such devices. Nevertheless, an awareness of structure, and other literary features in the Hebrew Bible, may have important consequences for the way a passage is translated and laid out. As Porten points out, “structure is not simply artificial device or literary elegance. It is a key to meaning. Oversight of structure may result in failure to grasp the true theme.”

<sup>20</sup> See Porten, *Gratz* 7 (1978), 23.

<sup>21</sup> B. Porten, “The Structure and Theme of the Solomon Narrative (1 Kings 3–11)”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 38 (1967), p. 95.

Likewise, failure to correctly delimit the sections of a text may distort its meaning. So, an awareness of literary structure may be helpful, both in determining the boundaries, and also the main themes of individual sections. With this in mind I shall suggest an analysis and possible section headings for the Book of Ruth.<sup>22</sup> I shall suggest only one possibility for each chapter but several options for each section heading.

### Analysis

- |            |  |                      |
|------------|--|----------------------|
| <b>I</b>   | <b>RUTH GOES TO BETHLEHEM WITH NAOMI</b>   | <b>(1.1–22a)</b>     |
|            | 1. Sojourners in Moab / Elimelech and his family go to Moab / Tragedy in Moab  | (1.1–7b)             |
|            | 2. A faithful daughter-in-law / “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” / Ruth returns with Naomi        | (1.7–19a)            |
|            | 3. Arrival in Bethlehem / Naomi’s lament / Naomi bewails bereavement to the women                                      | (1.19b–22a)          |
| <b>II</b>  | <b>RUTH GLEANS IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ</b>  | <b>(1.22b–2.23a)</b> |
|            | 4. Ruth’s Plan / Naomi approves Ruth’s plan to go gleaning / Ruth goes gleaning and chances on the field of Boaz       | (1.22b–2.3)          |
|            | 5. Boaz’ favour (kindness) to Ruth / The first meeting of Boaz and Ruth  | (2.4–17)             |
|            | 6. Ruth’s encouraging report to Naomi / Naomi and Ruth say how the meeting has gone                                    | (2.18–23a)           |
| <b>III</b> | <b>RUTH’S APPEAL TO BOAZ</b>   | <b>(2.23b–3.18)</b>  |
|            | 7. Naomi’s plan / Ruth accepts Naomi’s plan  | (2.23b–3.7)          |
|            | 8. Boaz favours Ruth / Another meeting with Boaz / Boaz recognizes Ruth’s request                                      | (3.8–14a)            |
|            | 9. Ruth reports to Naomi / Naomi and Ruth say how the meeting has gone / Naomi tells the women about her bitter sorrow | (3.14b–18)           |
| <b>IV</b>  | <b>BOAZ MARRIES RUTH</b>   | <b>(4.1–22)</b>      |
|            | 10. The legal case / Boaz wins the right to marry Ruth   | (4.1–11b)            |
|            | 11. A son is Born / The women celebrate the birth of Naomi’s grandson  | (4.11c–17)           |
|            | 12. A Famous Lineage / The family line of David  | (4.18–22)            |

<sup>22</sup> See the similar analyses of chapter headings by C. F. Keil (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Ruth*, Edinburgh, 1887 ad loc.) and E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, London, 1964, p. 341. Note also the analyses of Porten, *Gratz* (1978) p. 23, and Würthwein, *Ruth* (ad loc.), the latter giving more attention to the role of Naomi.

The chapter headings emphasize Ruth's role in the story.<sup>23</sup> Other analyses might give less attention to Ruth, preferring to emphasize Naomi's function in the story, because Naomi appears to be the main actor in Ch 1 and her latter felicity is the focus of attention at the end of the dénouement, notably 4.14–17. However, I suggest that the central place given to the praise of Ruth, both in Episodes II and III, and also in the rhetorical centre of Section 11 (4.11c–17), signify that this is really Ruth's story.

**Section 1:** It is difficult to summarize this tightly written piece, so any heading is likely to be inadequate.

**Section 2:** There are three important parts to this section: a blessing which requires fulfilment; Naomi's central speech emphasizing her hopelessness with the intent of deterring the girls from following; and Ruth's statement of loyalty. The latter I take to be the highpoint of this section and hence worth accentuating in the heading.

**Section 3:** It may be preferable to indicate the content of Naomi's speech rather than the setting, if possible in such a way as to indicate the link with Section 11, where the women finally give their reply.

**Section 4:** In heading this section it may be wise to use a title that will correspond with the title of Section 7.

**Section 5:** It is probably best to accentuate the kindness of Boaz to Ruth. The whole of this chapter shows the gracious inclusion of Ruth by Boaz. Note the link with Section 8.

**Section 6:** The title should if possible link with the title of Section 9.

**Section 7:** In addition to noting the correspondence with Section 4, it may be desirable to choose a heading emphasizing Ruth's obedience to Naomi.

**Section 8:** It may be desirable to choose a title indicating that Boaz recognizes or acknowledges the propriety of Ruth's request.

**Section 9:** See comment on Section 6.

**Section 10:** Note the correspondence with Section 2.

**Section 11:** This dénouement draws together all the loose ends, with fulfilment of prayer and the restoration of Naomi. It is perhaps worth indicating in the choice of title that the blessings given by the women (vv. 14–15) are an answer to Naomi's lament in Section 3.

**Section 12:** It is likely that this genealogy would have made a particularly satisfying conclusion for the ancient Hebrew audience, showing the fruitful continuation of a threatened family line and culminating with the famous King David. The title "A Famous Lineage" conveys some idea of this happy conclusion.

<sup>23</sup> For general discussion on section headings, see E. Fry, *TBT* 34 (1983), 235–239. For Ruth, note discussion dispersed through *The Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth*.