RUTH 4:11 LXX—A MIDRASHIC DRAMATIZATION

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Textual reconstruction is not an independent discipline. Aside from several rules regarding errors common to the scribal craft, it draws on a variety of fields adjacent to it in the study of the humanities.¹ So, too, for textual reconstruction in the Bible: it depends upon history in all its branches—political, judicial, social, linguistic, intellectual and literary. All of these are guided by the art of interpretation, which weighs the different possibilities and selects—in a most subjective process—the most likely candidate.

This brief article will attempt to illuminate one presumed variant in the book of Ruth, with the assistance of the history of post-biblical Jewish literature, and more precisely, with the assistance of one of the characteristics of narrative midrash, i.e., aggadah. However, together with the clarifying of the textual readings—which is primary and which is secondary—an important witness to the beginnings of midrash in Second Temple times, and its penetration into biblical manuscripts, will emerge.

¹ A first version of this article was published in Hebrew in Texts, Temples, and Traditions (ed. M. V. Fox et al.; Eisenbrauns, 1996) 119*-124*. The present version has been expanded in light of comments by my colleagues Menahem Kister and Michael Segal. Translated by Simeon Chavel (Jerusalem).

¹ Comparable comments were made by H. B. Rosén in his article, “Was Herodotus Aware of Rhetorics? On the Usefulness of Linguistic Analysis for a Deepening of Our Understanding of Historiography,” in Isaac Leo Seeligmann Memorial Volume, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1985) 499–508 (Heb. with Eng. abstract).
In Ruth 4:11 we read:

ארמרנו כל התם אברהם ב.persistent: ויאמר אל חיה בס損害ך: "ברimbus: ויהו, את חיה שהבאת אלי בכותך כרחל ובלאך" ויהי.

And all the people at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman entering your home like Rachel and Leah” etc.

By contrast, the Septuagint offers here:

καὶ εἶπον πᾶς ὁ λαὸς οἱ ἐν τῇ πόλῃ Μαρτυρεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι εἶπον κύριος τήν γυναῖκα σου τήν εἰσπρομενήν εἰς τὸν σῖκον σου ὡς Ραχήλ καὶ ὡς Λείαν κτλ.

Retroverted into biblical Hebrew:

ירחמי הל תם אם שער כותר: "עבירי". והזוקみなさん אמרו: "יהוה, את אני 네מה אלי בכותך כרחל ובלאך" ויהי.

And all the people said, “We are witnesses.” And the elders said, “May the Lord make your wife who is entering your home like Rachel and like Leah” etc.

In the framework of this article, we will have recourse to the most significant difference between the Masoretic version (= MT) and the Septuagint (= LXX). While the MT joins together the people with the elders in one chorus, the LXX differentiates their roles—the people say “we are witnesses” and the elders add to them a blessing for Ruth and Boaz. The question is, does LXX reflect a Hebrew Vorlage, and if so, is this presumed reading preferable to MT? This question may not be decisive for the understanding of the message of the book of Ruth, but its clarification will reveal a glimpse of the processes of the textual transmission of the Bible or its translations in the Second Temple period.

Several of the foremost scholars have preferred LXX to MT in this verse. Among them, in this century, one may count Ehrlich, Jouon, Kahana, and Robinson. Indeed, some of them did not even provide a reason for their position, but we may presume that they were attracted to the vibrant portrait in LXX, according to

which the audience present divides into two choruses, the people who witness and the elders who bless.  

Those who prefer MT likewise do not always feel the need to justify their stance. Such, for example, is the case with Bertholet, Nowack, and Haller.  

Campbell, on the other hand, pointed to the fact that in MT the elders and all the people together constitute the intended audience of Boaz's preceding address (v. 9). Moreover, they appear in the chiastic order so dear to biblical style: “Boaz said to the elders and all the people” — “All the people at the gate and the elders said.”  

Zakovitch held that “the immediate transition between the witness formula and the blessing disturbed a number of the translators. The Septuagint therefore split those at the gate into two bodies, one serving as witnesses and the other offering blessing...”  

Thus, considerations point in each direction: MT offers chiastic harmony, although, on the other hand, it does contain a sudden transition. LXX is both smoother and more vibrant. However, are these the characteristics of the original text, the result of a later revision in a Hebrew manuscript, or the work of the translator? No decisive evidence has been presented to break this stalemate.  

And yet, it nevertheless appears feasible to me to reach quite a concrete conclusion in this issue, as follows: LXX here reflects a Hebrew Vorlage extant in

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3 Joëton gives his own justification: “D’après le TM, tout le peuple, avec les anciens, formule le souhait. Mais il est difficile que ce souhait d’allure poétique, avec allusions savantes à Rachel et Lia à Pères et Tamar, soit prononcé par le peuple.” It appears to me that the interpreter’s demands on the text for realism are too great—and, therefore, illegitimate.

4 A. Bertholet, *Das Buch Ruth* (HKAT; Tübingen, 1898) ad loc.; W. Nowack, *Richter, Ruth etc.* (HKAT; Göttingen, 1902) ad loc.; M. Haller, *Die fünf Megilloth* (HAT; Tübingen, 1940) ad loc.


7 Naturally, original suggestions are not lacking. Gressmann, for example, deleted “the people” in both verses 9 and 11. Cf. H. Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels* (SATA 1/2; Göttingen, 1922) 267, and ibidem in the appendix, p. 12.
Second Temple times, but one that is secondary. A comparison of its characteristics with one of the qualities of midrash will supply the proof.

A recurring phenomenon in narrative midrash consists of the enrichment of biblical narrative through the apportioning of speeches among different protagonists. In this way the number of voices multiplies, and various, even contradictory tendencies may appear. Generally speaking, the result improves the narrative by adding vitality and poignancy, in a word, dramatization.

The classic place in which this trait is developed is t. Sot. 9:3–9, which brings no fewer than eight examples of this kind of homily.8 It will suffice to bring two of them:

Similarly, you find: “We came to the land you sent us to” (Num 13:27) — Joshua said this; Caleb said, “let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession of it” (v. 30); the spies said, “however, the people who inhabit the country are powerful” (v. 28); three statements side by side—whoever said one did not say the other... Similarly, you find: “Woe to us! Who will save us from this mighty God?” (1 Sam 4:8a)—the righteous ones among them said this; the wicked among them said, “This is the God who brought ten plagues (in Egypt) and then concluded his plagues in the Wilderness!” (v. 8b); the valorous among them said, “Brace yourselves and be men, O Philistines!” (v. 9); three statements side by side etc.

Several aspects in this class of homily indicate its relative antiquity. One notes, in the first place, that it merited several different developments, for these developments demonstrate that the basic type was well known and widespread to the degree that it was reworked in different ways and met new needs. One development consists of the very formation of a series of homiletic units of uniform pattern—eight in the Tosefta, as we mentioned, and three in b. Mak., which we will see further on. A different development, which adds to the dramatization, assigns one of the roles to God himself. Such is the case, for example, in b. Mak. 23b:9

R. Eliezer said: in three places the Holy Spirit appeared, in the court of Shem, in the court of Samuel of Ramah, and in the court of Solomon. In the court of Shem, as it is

8 Cf. S. Lieberman, ed., Tosefta According to MS Vienna (Newark, 1973) 210–213 (Heb.); so, too, S. Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshutah, Expanded Commentary to the Tosefta (Newark, 1973) 716–717 (Heb.). I am grateful to my colleague Prof. A. Shinan for referring me to these passages.

9 This passage, too, was graciously pointed out to me by Prof. A. Shinan.
written, “Judah recognized (them) and said, ‘She is in the right’” (Gen 38:26). How did he know (she was right)—perhaps just as he went to her, so went another man? A divine voice called out, “I declared the secret (that Tamar’s children came from Judah).” In the court of Samuel, as it is written etc.

A different passage, in which one of the roles is attributed to God, is the first exposition among those we mentioned by t. Sot. 9:3, that has a more detailed parallel in m. Sot. 9:6, as follows:

The elders of the city wash their hands in water at the place of the calf’s neck-breaking and they say, “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it” (Deut 21:7)... And the priests say, “Absolve Israel Your people, whom You redeemed, God, and do not let the blood of the innocent remain among Israel Your people” (v. 8). They did not have to say, “They will be absolved of the bloodguilt” (v. 8); rather, the Holy Spirit would notify them, “When you do like this, the blood atones for you.”

Here we see the beginnings of a different kind of development, a legal one. By attributing the statements to various voices, in the spirit of “whoever said this one did not say the other,” the Sages established order in the neck-breaking ceremony in the riverbed. From here on it is clear not only what the elders of Jerusalem do and what the elders of the specific city do (m. Sot. 9:1, 5), but also the Levitical priests, who, in the biblical description, play no substantial role (Deut 21:5), now find their place in this ritual.

The impression gained is that the kind of exposition which apportions roles has its roots in narrative homilies, where it appears frequently, and then extended into legal homilies, where it appears sporadically, in a secondary process. This impression grows stronger in view of the following legal discussion, in which the attribution of roles is done in a much more forced manner, with only a tenuous link to the Scriptural passage. This is the baraita in t. Sanh. 4:5:

R. Eliezer the son of R. Yose says: The elders asked appropriately, as it says, “Give us a king to judge us” (1 Sam 8:6), but the populace went and spoiled it, as it says, “And we will be like the rest of the nations, and our king will judge us, and go out before us to fight” etc. (v. 20).

The exposition resolves the problem, “why, then, were they punished in Samuel’s days,” posed against R. Judah, who held that appointing a king is one of the three commandments Israel were supposed to fulfill upon entering the land of Israel. The answer is that they requested a king in an inappropriate manner. They spoiled the request when they said, “like all the other nations,” at the end of v. 5: “Now,
then, give us a king to judge us like all the nations.” This spoiling of the request the exposition attributes to the populace, relying on vv. 19–20: “And the people refused ... and they said ... and we will be like all the other nations.” By contrast, claims the exposition, the elders asked appropriately, and it relies on the request cited in v. 6: “Give us a king to judge us.” The forced nature of this exposition stands out in the fact that it divides the one statement in v. 5 between two speakers, in its reliance (regarding the elders’ positive request) specifically on v. 6, which begins, “And the thing was bad in Samuel’s eyes when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us’,” and in its reconstruction of the role of the populace from the end of the story, in vv. 19–20, after they had already received Samuel’s angry and threatening response.

And indeed, an excellent proof for the antiquity of the homiletic attribution of roles exists in its appearance in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Vayehi Beshaloh, end of par. 2.10

Israel divided into four groups by the Sea. One said to jump into the Sea, another said to return to Egypt, another said to wage war, and another said “Let us cry out against them.” To those who said to jump into the Sea was said, “Stand and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exod 14:13a). To those who said to return to Egypt was said, “For that which you have seen of Egypt...” (14:13b). To those who said, “Let us wage war,” was said, “The Lord will fight for you” (14:14a). To those who said, “Let us cry out against them,” was said, “And you – hold your peace” (14:14b).

Joseph Heinemann discussed this exposition and clarified that originally it contained only three groups, since the fourth, “Let us cry out against them,” amounts to a repetition of the third, “Let us wage war.”11 So, too, he pointed out two parallels to the legend of “three groups by the Sea,” in the Samaritan Memar Marqah and in Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Bibliarum.12


11 Joseph Heinemann, Aggadot and Their Histories (Jerusalem, 1974) 93 (Heb.).

12 Ibid., 92.
The latter reads:  
Tunc, considerantes metum temporis, Israel filii in tres divisiones consiliorum
diviserunt sententias suas. Nam tribus Ruben et tribus Ysachar, et tribus Zabulon, et
tribus Symeon dixerunt: Venite mittamus nos in mare. Melius est enim nos in aqua
mori, quam ab inimicis concidi. Tribus autem Gad, et tribus Aser, et tribus Dan et tribus
Neptalim dixerunt: Non, sed revertamur cum eis, et si voluerint donare nobis vitam,
serviamus eis. Nam tribus Levi et tribus Juda, e Joseph et Benjamin dixerunt: Non sic,
sed accipientes arma nostra, pugnemus cum eis, et erit Deus nobiscum (x 3).

Memar Marqah exposit similaris:  
They were divided at the sea into three divisions. Each division made a statement and
the great prophet made a reply corresponding to each statement. The first division said,
"Let us ... go back to Egypt and let us serve the Egyptians ... for it would have been
better for us ... than to die in the wilderness." The great prophet Moses said, "You shall
never see them again." The second division said, "Let us flee from the Egyptians into the
desert." The great prophet Moses said to them, "Stand firm, and see the salvation of the
Lord, which He will work for you today." The third division said, "Let us arise and fight
against the Egyptians." The great prophet Moses said to them, "The Lord will fight for
you, and you have only to be still."

It is impressive that basically the same aggadah appears in three utterly distinct
sources. This wide distribution, along with the fact that Bib. Ant. was composed
towards the end of the first century CE, indicates, in my opinion, that the core of
the legend must have been relatively old, perhaps going back to Hasmonaean
times, when the question of how to respond to being overtaken by the Seleucid
army was a crucial one. Moreover, the ancient character of the homilies that recast
biblical stories by apportioning roles among their protagonists emerges with

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13 In chap. 10, par. 3; cf. G. Kisch, Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum (Notre Dame,
Ind., 1949) 141; M. R. James, The Biblical Antiquities of Philo (London, 1917) 104. For a Hebrew
translation see: 37 אֶנָּשׁ הָרְשָׁעׁ חָשָׁר מַעַרְכַּת נָאָר מַעַרְכַּת עֲבֹרָהָה (לֵל–אַבּ), עֲבֹרָהָה (לֵל–אַבּ). Father
Bernard Dupuy kindly referred me to S. M. Olyan, "The Israelites Debate Their Options at the
Sea of Reeds—LAB 10:3, Its Parallels and Pseudo-Philo’s Ideology and Background,”
JBL 110 (1991) 75–91. Olyan detects the beginnings of the exposition concerning the groups
by the Sea in The Biblical Antiquities, but he did not take into consideration the presence of a
general and widespread homiletical trait.

14 Cf. Memar Marqah 4:8; J. Macdonald (ed. and transl.), Memar Marqah (BZAW 84; Berlin,
1963) 1.100–101; 2.167. For the Hebrew see, 278–274.земי, זֵמִי, נְבֵי חֲיָם, מַעַרְכַּת, מַעַרְכַּת וּפוּרַשׁ (וּפֹרַשׁ), נְבֵי חֲיָם, זֵמִי.
clarity as well. In any case, there is no doubt that this diversification of roles, perpetrated by the Jewish *aggadah*, animated the biblical story ever more.

Returning to Ruth 4:11, the following conclusions suggest themselves. The reading found in MT is primary. In the book of Ruth, composed in Second Temple times,¹⁵ yet seeking to imitate as much as possible the ancient modes of expressions, the roles had not yet been divided between the elders and the people present at the gate. LXX provides a secondary reading, in line with later Second Temple midrash. Nevertheless, since this brand of homily is primarily a phenomenon found in Hebrew literature, and from the land of Israel, the LXX reading should not be regarded as the work of translators, but as emerging in the Hebrew *Vorlage*, a secondary Hebrew reading. Homiletic elements penetrated into a Hebrew manuscript of the book of Ruth before the book was translated into Greek. This presents reliable testimony to the early development of the *aggadah* and its penetration into Hebrew biblical manuscripts.

An additional instance of the diversification of roles in a textual witness of the Hebrew Bible has been pointed out to me by Mr. Michael Segal (Jerusalem). It obtains in 1 Sam 1:25–26. MT reads:

रियशस्त्र आ हर रक्षा आ हन्ना आ तले. रतामर: “बि आदिनी” गोर.’

They slaughtered the ox and brought the lad to Eli. She said, “Please, sir,” etc.

As against it, the LXX reads:

Καὶ προσήγαγον ἐκώπιον κυρίου, καὶ ἔσφαξεν ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ τὴν θυσίαν, ἢν ἐποίει ἐξ ἡμερῶν ἐἰς ἡμέρας τῶν κυρίων, καὶ προσήγαγεν τὸ παιδάριον καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν μόσχον. καὶ προσήγαγεν Ανω ἢ μήτηρ τοῦ παιδαρίου πρὸς Ηλί καὶ ἔπειν ἐν ἐμοὶ, κύριε κτλ.

And they brought him before the Lord; and his father slew his offering which he offered from year to year to the Lord; and he brought near the child, and slew the calf; and

¹⁵ Cf. A. Brenner, *The Love of Ruth* (Tel-Aviv, 1988) 119–163 (Heb.). This contains the richest collection of linguistic evidence for the late dating of Ruth. In my view, evidence from other realms should not be disclaimed.
Anna the mother of the child brought him to Eli. And she said, “I pray thee, my lord” etc.\(^{16}\) Admittedly, MT is too laconic. It does not explicitly state that Hannah is the subject of והאם at the beginning of v. 26, and one has to infer it from the context. LXX, however, is patently redundant. Twice we read that the ox has been slaughtered and three times there is a coming (or bringing) to the presence of the Lord or His priest. In the light of what we have seen, this redundancy may be explained. It was caused by the intervention of a second hand, that of a Hebrew literate who keenly ascribed to Elkanah a proper role in the dedication of Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 2:11 MT).

Further evidence for the intrusion of Jewish aggadah into Scripture exists in other biblical books and in additional textual witnesses. In 4QSam\(^4\) the story of the war waged by Nahash the Ammonite against Jabesh-gilead has been enriched by an extensive description of how Nahash gouged out the right eyes of all Gad and Reuben. The description has been added into 1 Sam 10:27b, and it comes to accentuate, in homiletical spirit, the hateful and cruel character of Nahash the Ammonite.\(^{17}\)

In 1 Kgs 22:28b, according to MT, Micaiah son of Jimgla concludes his speech with the words “Hear all (you) nations.” This sentence is not represented in the best LXX manuscripts.\(^{18}\) At the same time, the sentence does not link up with Micaiah’s previous speech, but rather repeats word for word the opening of the book of Micah (Mic 1:2). Presumably, it has been inserted here with the homiletical purpose of identifying Micaiah son of Jimgla, the prophet from the days of Ahab, with Micah, the Morashite, who prophesied in the days of Yotam, Ahaz and

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\(^{16}\) Adapted from L. C. L. Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982 [originally publ. London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1851]).


Hezekiah (Mic. 1:1). The homiletical tendency to identify biblical personalities with each other was already well recognized by Isaac Heinemann. One of its more prominent examples, close to our own topic, identifies Obadiah “who was over the house” in the days of Ahab (1 Kgs 18:3–16) with the prophet Obadiah, author of the book in the Twelve Prophets.

I shall close with two general conclusions. The homiletical expansions seen here are not typical of a single textual witness; they appear in various witnesses, which are attributable to separate text-types. In 1 Sam 10:27, the expansion occurs in the manuscript 4QSam; in 1 Kgs 22:28 it appears in MT; in Ruth 4:11 it is reflected in LXX. To wit, this is quite a widespread phenomenon. It seems, then, that in a certain period during the Second Commonwealth copyists would “enrich” the text with homiletical remarks. The fruits of their work survived in different textual witnesses, this one with more examples, that one with fewer. And the diffusion of the phenomenon, in different passages in different textual witnesses, indicates its relative antiquity. Presumably, it occurred when the biblical books were still copied in quite a free fashion, apparently before the Hasmonean period.

This homiletical tendency in 1 Kgs 22:28b has been noted on more than one occasion by the late I. L. Seeligmann. This explanation is preferable in my opinion to that of Ball, according to whom the sentence under discussion was added by a Deuteronomistic editor who wished to emphasize the continuity from Micaiah to Micah (E. Ball, “A Note on 1 Kings XXII. 28,” JT N.S. 28 [1977] 90–94).


Cf. b. Sanh. 39b: “The vision of Obadiah: Thus says the Lord God to Edom etc.; what has Obadiah to do with Edom? R. Isaac said, The Holy One Blessed Be He said, Let Obadiah, who lived among two wicked people [Ahab and Jezebel] and did not learn from their misdeeds, come and prophesy against the wicked Esau, who lived among two righteous people [Isaac and Rebekkah] and did not learn from their deeds.”

Indeed, the Greek translation of Ruth is late, since it has connections with the school of Aquila (translating “Shaddai” as ιερομενος in Ruth 1:20, 21) and with proto-Theodotion (rendering δια by καιρος in 1:5; 2:15, 16, 21; 3:12; 4:10); see M. Harl, G. Dorival and O. Munnich, La bible grecque des Septante (Paris, 1988) 83–111. Nevertheless, from the consideration brought above, one should accept the relative antiquity of the expansion in the Greek translation of Ruth 4:11. I am grateful to P. G. Borbone of Turin (Italy) who discussed this subject with me.
Appendix

The homily apportioning statements among different characters exists in an additional text, the most famous of all, the baraita regarding the four sons. For this baraita takes four biblical passages, which describe a conversation with one’s son, and assigns each one to a son of different character. Relying on the version of the baraita that appears in the Passover Haggadah, the question, “What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the Lord our God has enjoined upon you” (Deut 6:20), is attributed to the wise son; the question, “What do you mean by this rite” (Exod 12:26), is given to the wicked son; the question, “What does this mean” (Exod 13:14), is put in the mouth of the simple son; while the statement that has no preceding question, “You shall tell your son on that day” (Exod 13:8), is understood as the explanation of the father to the son who does not know to ask. Mildly different versions are brought in the Mekhīltā de Rabbi Ishmael and in y. Pesahim.23

It appears to me that our conclusions up until this point may have an impact on the history of the baraita of the four sons. Scholars already surmised that originally there existed an exposition on only three sons—the wise one, the simple one, and the one who does not know to ask, while the wicked son was imported from another context.24 Indeed, the “wicked son” does not belong in a series dealing with the intellectual qualities of the sons, but rather introduces a moral judgment. Both Mekhīltā collections attest to his independence from the series, since they mention him alone in another passage.25 Now, if Heinemann was correct when he showed that the original exposition on three parties in Israel by the Sea was expanded to four, then there is an additional piece of evidence, by analogy, that an exposition on three sons was expanded to the exposition on four.

23 D. Goldschmidt, The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History over the Ages (Jerusalem, 1960) 22–23 (Heb.).


25 Mek. de Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, Bo, on Exod 12:26 (Hebrew), in J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed, eds., Mek. de Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai (Jerusalem, 1955) 26; Mek. de Rabbi Ishmael (supra, n. 10), 66. And see Goldschmidt (supra, n. 23), 25, who arranged the passages synoptically.
As to the date of the baraita on the sons, some saw it as early, from before the Maccabbean Revolt; others dated it late, to the end of the Tannaitic period. I am not qualified to enter into this disagreement. Yet the study of Ruth 4:11 has clarified, in any case, that the “apportioning of roles” constitutes a relatively ancient homiletic feature, which appeared, as it seems, in the beginning of the Hellenistic period. It appears, then, that at least in terms of its contents, the baraita on the four (three) sons belongs to quite an ancient stage of the midrashic production.

26 Finkelstein (supra, n. 24), 8-18.
27 Goldschmidt (supra, n. 23), 28.
28 Were I more daring, I would even venture to say that the exposition on the wicked son, too, as preserved in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai (supra, n. 25), has signs of antiquity: “When your sons shall ask you—they are destined to ask you, What do you mean by this rite? This is the wicked son who excludes himself from the community...” Is the disagreement between the “fathers” and the “sons” known to us from Mal 3:24 and from Jubilees 23:9-23 not reflected here? See further A. Rofé, “The Onset of Sects in Postexilic Judaism: Neglected Evidence from the Septuagint, Trito-Isaiah, Ben Sira and Malachi,” in The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to H. C. Kee, (ed. J. Neusner et al., Philadelphia, 1988) 39-49, esp. 45-47.