MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Essays on the Bible and Judaism
in Honor of Tamara Cohn Eskenazi

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Abbreviations

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992).
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ATAbh	Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
Bib	*Biblica*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BR	*Bible Review*
BZAW	Beihefte zur *ZAW*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CCAR Journal	*Central Conference of American Rabbis: The Reform Jewish Quarterly*
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CRBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
DCH	David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (8 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011).
DDD²	Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2nd revised edn, 1999).
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	*Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (eds.), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. M.E.J. Richardson; 5 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000).
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962).
IDBSup	*IDB*, Supplementary Volume
ISBE	Geoffrey Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. edn, 1979–88).

JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JOFA	Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance
JPS, JPSV	*Jewish Publication Society Version*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSIJ	*Jewish Studies—An Internet Journal*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series
JSSSup	*Journal of Semitic Studies* Supplements
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KTU	M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín (eds.), *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, einschliesslich der keilalphabetischen Texte ausserhalb Ugarits* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976–).
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NS	new series
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquus
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OS	old series
OTL	Old Testament Library
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBLSCS	SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
Sem	*Semitica*
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TBü	Theologische Bücherei
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VT	*Vetus Testamentun*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

FAREWELL TO 'MR SO AND SO' (RUTH 4.1)?

Jack M. Sasson

In her magisterial JPS Bible Commentary to *Ruth* (2011: 71) our honoree Tamara Eskenazi annotated a phrase occurring in Ruth 4.1 as follows:

> **So-and-so!** Hebrew *ploni 'almoni*, an expression used when a name (of a person or place) is immaterial to the narrative (see I Sam. 21.3). Here, however, the term is intentionally and conspicuously used to avoid naming the character. The purpose for the anonymity of the man remains a mystery. As scholars note, it is not likely that Boaz does not know the man's name. If the name were insignificant to the author, the designation could simply have been eliminated. Some Rabbinic sages, as well as modern scholars … suggest that not naming implies measure-for-measure justice: the one who refuses to 'preserve the name' of a kin … deserves to have his own name vanish. Others argue that the narrator may wish to protect him from the embarrassment resulting from his inability or unwillingness to undertake responsibility for Ruth and Naomi … Some Rabbinic sources suppose that the man's name was Tov (as per 3.13). The Targum, however, has: 'you, whose ways are secret.' The same notion is reflected in some Septuagint manuscripts, as well as suggested by Rashi. Rashi also explores the etymology from *'alman* (a play on *'almoni*) which means 'widower' and 'a mute', a reference to the man's lack of awareness that exclusion in Deut. 23.4 applies solely to males.

I have cited a good portion of this annotation not just to remind us all of Tamara's fine capacity to distill issues raised in the literature, but also because her words contain a potential solution to a little crux that has been with us for at least two millennia. I am happy to offer her a suggestion and I hope she finds merit in it.

Names

The scene to which this annotation applies is too well known to deserve extended background. Boaz had earlier assured Ruth that he will assume the redemption of Naomi's land, but that there was another Bethlehemite who has priority to do so. Here is what happened on the morrow of his promise (Ruth 4.1): 'No sooner had Boaz gone up to the [city's] gate to wait there, than the redeemer mentioned by Boaz chanced by. He hailed him, "Come

over and sit here, *pĕlōnî 'almōnî*!" He came over and sat.' Boaz assembles witnesses and manages to shift to himself the responsibility of redemption.

   The puzzle here is *pĕlōnî 'almōnî*. The phrase's grammar has been analyzed extensively: It is a *farrago*, a (rhyming) medley of words that gains meaning through context.[1] But what does it mean? Is it a substitute for the expected name of the potential redeemer? What is odd is that Ruth is not a book to shy away from naming the living as well as dead. Practically every single character of any note gets one.[2] The absence of a recognizable name at this crucial juncture, therefore, is so jarring that, since the Greek translation of Scripture, a rich assortment of renderings has been offered prompting a largely circular hunt for an etymology for each of the two components of the idiom.[3] Most translations, if they do not simply ignore the phrase, craft a circumlocution for it, among them, '(Mr) So-and-so; Mr X; (my) friend; Such a one; Hey you (Eng.)', 'Toi, un tel (Fr.)', 'Eh, fulano (Sp.; from Arabic *fulān*)', 'du, der und der; du Soundso' (Ger.)', 'gij, zulk een! (Dutch)', 'O tu, tal de' tali (Ital.)'.[4] In so doing, they foist on the narrator intentional effacement rather than narratological parsimony, and so encourage speculation on the narrator's motivation, sometimes imaginatively but most often frivolously.[5]

Anonymity

At the heart of most speculations on the phrase *pĕlōnî 'almōnî* is the issue of anonymity of characters. In Scripture, it is so widely featured that a very fine monograph has been written about it (Reinhartz 1998). While Hebrew narratives are full of characters with bit parts, many among them bearing no distinctive label let alone names, anonymity is hardly ever insignificance and certainly not necessarily equivalent to the state of being unknown or

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   1.   *tōhû vāvōhû* ('mish-mash') of Gen. 1.2 is another such form. The rhyming element of the phrase rehearses an earlier display when Mahlon and Chilion (*maḥlôn vĕkilyôn*) are introduced as the doomed sons of Elimelech and Naomi (Ruth 1.2). While by no means obscure etymologically, the last names are singularly inappropriate ('Sickly' and 'Languishing') in all ways but as cues to what is about to happen.
   2.   An exception is Boaz's supervisor in Ruth 2. Members of a group (elders, citizens of Bethlehem, neighboring women) also do not, for obvious reasons. Nice comments on the names of characters are in Saxegaard 2010: 55-73.
   3.   See Hubbard 1988: 233-34 n. 10. Fine annotations of issues raised by the Greek in Assan-Dhôte and Moatti-Fine 1986: 102-103.
   4.   A notable exception is Luther's 1545 Bible, 'Komm und setze dich etwa hie oder da her'. Josephus is too expansive to be useful here.
   5.   Tamara has surveyed some of the suggestions; but they can easily be multiplied by visiting Ruth commentaries. The most sustained discussion is offered by Campbell 1975: 141-43. Trible (1978: 190) has the most succinct reaction: 'anonymity implies judgment'.

hidden (Reinhartz 1998: 11). Anonymous characters can propel plots, as does the man Joseph encounters when searching for his brothers (Gen. 37.15). They can be major players, as is the servant who finds a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24). They can set in motion major events, as does the raped woman of Judges 19. They can also quicken commemorative acts, as has Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11). And when many of them are aligned in a rather constricted interlude, as do the many unnamed *mothers* in Judges (of Sisera, Abimelech, Jephthah, Samson, Micah), the effect stimulates curiosity, as it has for me when writing the *Anchor Yale Bible* commentary to that book.

An aspect of this anonymity of characters is especially interesting for our context. It has to do with the occasions in which characters (some of them anonymous) in narratives make pronouncements in which they themselves invoke an unnamed character.[6] An interesting illustration occurs at 2 Kings 5. Commander Naaman of Aram, though mighty, has leprosy. An unnamed Hebrew slave to Naaman's wife tells her mistress, 'Would that my master come before the prophet, the one in Samaria; he would certainly cure him from his leprosy' (5.3). The narrator had made it clear that the slave had been taken captive from Israel as a young girl; so her loss of specific memory might be excused. As set within a series of wonders attributed to Elisha, the allusion to the prophet in Samaria could hardly be anonymous; but even if the anecdote had once been independent or self-contained, the narrator might have had less interest in demonstrating the slave's mental acuity than in showing why, in a court overflowing with prophets, the unnamed prophet could only be Elisha. Elisha divines Naaman's true mission when neither the king of Aram nor that of Israel had made a clue of it in their correspondence and reaction. The story moves to the transfer of the leprosy to Gehazi, displaying Elisha's capacity to hurt no less than to heal.[7]

Legalistic Setting

Ruth 4.1 is an example of this rarified rhetorical device in which a character ostensibly addresses another, but not by name. The difference from

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6. This phenomenon is to be differentiated from its occurrence in special genres of literature, where an anonymous name is supplied as a prototype for substitution. Thus in Akkadian *ikribū* prayers and in incantations, one finds *annanna mār annanna* ('So-and-so, son of So-and-so'), where the reciter is invited to insert the relevant name of the person to be affected, for good or ill consequences.

7. In Jonah 3, the king of Nineveh makes a proclamation in which he cites 'the king and his nobles' as authority. This is a matter of known attribution rather than anonymity. The same can be said for the Rabshakeh's citation of 'the Great King, king of Assyria' (2 Kgs 18.19).

the above instance is in the texture of the narrative. Despite its histori-
cizing setting ('In the days when judges were ruling …') and its tempo-
ral precision (after its initial setting, the story unfolds between the barley
and wheat harvests), Ruth remains a fine calque of a folkloristic tale (see
my commentary). However, the intricate subplot (how Ruth kept to her
oath of allegiance to Naomi even when marrying Boaz) secures plausibil-
ity through juridical anchoring. The narrator takes pain to shape a context
in which no transaction, least of all anything affecting the legitimacy of
Boaz's descendants, can be questioned. At the city gate (so a public set-
ting) Boaz assembles the requisite legal forum. There is legal dialogue of
the type that readily occurs when civil matters are to be decided, with pre-
cise articulation of the issue at hand and detail of the reaction of interested
parties. There is an official declaration of intent that forces one party to
retract its earlier decision. There is harking back to customary act of vali-
dation, illustrated by a symbolic act with legal ramification. There is affir-
mation by the witnesses.

It is true that Boaz summons his rival before constituting a legal unit;
nonetheless, with all this effort toward juristic verisimilitude as well as with
the record of generous deployment of personal names throughout the book,
having Boaz coyly avoid citing his rival by name by using *pĕlōnî 'almōnî* is
not just puzzling but uncharacteristic of the narrator's current style.[8] In fact,
in one of his earlier statements (3.12-13), Boaz did not cite his potential
rival by name, but referred to him only as the *gō'ēl*, 'redeemer'; and so does
the narrator (at 4.8). The man, therefore, was addressed by his legal status
and it is not surprising that Ruth (at 3.9) used this label for Boaz himself, as
did later the neighboring women (at 4.14).

A Suggestion

All this is to say that in Ruth 4.1 Boaz (and by extension, the narrator) may
never have needed to cite the redeemer by personal name, but only by his
function. If so, we will need to get back to what Tamara has to say about
pĕlōnî 'almōnî. Along with other commentators on the phrase, she observes
that the phrase substitutes for the name of person or place, keeping it inde-
terminate. Without getting mired in the murky search for an acceptable ety-
mology for its components, it can be said that the two other occurrences of
the full phrase do not refer to a person while the single possibly contracted
version (*palmōnî*) does.

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8. This is one reason why rabbinic authorities supplied a name for him: Tov or
Yig'al (derived from Ruth 3.13). Joüon (1986: 80), comments, 'ces mots, bien entendu,
ne sont pas de Booz'.

1. David answering Ahimelech, the priest (1 Sam 21.3 TNK [RSV 21.2]): 'The king has ordered me on a mission, and he said to me, "No one must know anything about the mission on which I am sending you and for which I have given you orders". So I have directed my young men to such and such a place (*'el-mĕqôm pĕlōnî 'almōnî*).'[9] I do note here that were it not for the insertion of the word *māqôm*, translators might conceivably have rendered 'to So-and-So'.

2. 'While the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he took counsel with his officers and said, "I will encamp in such and such a place (*'el-mĕqôm pĕlōnî 'almōnî*)"' (2 Kgs 6.8 TNK).[10] In this case, *māqôm* seems superfluous, as *pĕlōnî 'almōnî* can only apply to place.

3. '…another holy being said to whoever it was (*lappalmōnî*) who was speaking, "How long will what was seen in the vision last …?"' (Dan. 8.13 TNK). This concoction must apply to a person and not a place.

Spare though they may be, the references to the full phrase do suggest that we might be dealing with a circumlocution for an unidentified or unspecified place. This notion is sharpened by pre-placement of a locus (in the Samuel and Kings passage, *māqôm*), presumably because without it the application of the phrase might not be as clear. So when in our context Boaz asks the rival to sit 'here' (*pōh*), use of the the adverb should encourage the following translation of Ruth 4.1, 'No sooner had Boaz gone up to the [city's] gate to wait there, than the redeemer mentioned by Boaz chanced by. He hailed him, "Come over and sit here, at such and such spot". He came over and sat.'[11]

Let Tamara assess this suggestion in the second edition of her fine commentary.

9. The Greek here offers a translation as well as a transliteration: '…in a place called Faithfulness of God, Φελλανι Αλεμωνι'.

10. The Greek solves the mystery with 'I will encamp at this certain place, Elmoni (ελμωνι)'.

11. A while ago, my Vanderbilt colleague Douglas Knight came to my office to discuss this passage and how to treat *pĕlōnî 'almōnî*. As we reviewed the context, the solution offered above promptly dawned on us. He incorporated the insight into a book he has co-authored with another colleague, Amy-Jill Levine, where this statement is offered (Knight and Levine 2011: 115), 'Boaz invites [the nearest living kin] to sit down with a rather odd phrase, *peloni almoni*, translated in the NRSV with the neighborly touch of 'friend', but in the JPS as 'So-and-so!' It seems a rather dismissive way of speaking to a relative. A better translation connects *peloni almoni* to the word 'here': 'Come over, and sit here somewhere'.

For the arguments and philology offered above, however, I remain responsible.

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