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## Abstract

The Latin text of the Book of Ruth begins with the letter “I” (*In diebus unius judicis*). The decoration of the initial can include a figure or a scene. The figure could represent Samuel, the author, Eli-melech or Ruth, with different meanings. The scene included one of the most significant episodes of the story, which allowed the reader to recognize and recall the main events. Due to the long and narrow shape of this letter, medieval illuminators frequently represented several scenes, each one on a different register. This paper will focus on the variety of visual readings of this iconographical cycle depending on the chosen scenes. Two concerns are of special relevance. First, the question as to what extent the iconographic representation remained faithful to the text; whether there were variants and if these were significant or not. Second, the interpretation that the reader made of the images that he or she contemplated.\*

In this study, I want to focus my attention on the medieval images that appear in the historiated initial *I* of the incipit (*In diebus unius judicis*) of the Latin text of the Book of Ruth. Before I begin, I would like to establish the fundamental lines of my research. It should be made clear that I am a philologist and not an art historian, and consequently my academic training conditions the way that I look at images. That is why “the way of looking” or, in other words, the questions that I ask regarding the representations combine elements from philology, literature, and art. My main concern in this study is twofold: first, I will look at the relationship that was established between the biblical text and the image that accompanies it. This will lead to the question as to what extent the iconographic representation remained faithful to the text, whether there were variants introduced and if so, whether these were significant or not. Second, I am interested in the resulting visual reading of the iconography, that is, the interpretation that the reader made of the images that he or she contemplated.

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In the case of the initials of the Book of Ruth, the illuminator had to work with a rather small space. The narrow and elongated shape of the letter / conditioned the way in which the miniature was created. The artist was forced to represent concise and very schematic scenes with very little detail. For this reason, the miniature does not seek to show a complete and detailed visual description of the scene(s) but rather to elicit, suggest, or remind the reader of the narrative that he illustrates and the teachings derived from it.<sup>1</sup> The importance of these images lies not only in their decorative and ornamental capacity, but also in the important role they play in bringing the reader, through the representation of the visible, into non-visible realities, into a deeper understanding of the Bible, and ultimately closer to God.

In this article, I am especially interested in identifying the main scenes represented in the initials. The selection of scenes is connected to the beliefs and concerns of each historical moment so that certain episodes are more significant and relevant than others. In the Middle Ages the most common scenes are the *Peregrinatio* and Ruth gleaning in the fields. From the Gothic period onwards, a miniature usually appears next to the inhabited initial, but in those cases, I have left the study of the miniature for a later discussion and just focus on the initial.

## 1. The Historiated Initials of the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth is one of the shortest in the Bible. During the time of Judges, Elimelech, Naomi and her children departed from Bethlehem to Moab because of a famine. There Elimelech died and his sons married two Moabites, Orpah and Ruth. Years later also the two sons died and Naomi decided to return to her land. On the return trip, Ruth, who refused to leave her, accompanied her. To support Naomi and herself in this new land, Ruth became a gleaner, picking up the wheat-ears that the reapers let fall in the fields. The Israelite Law (Leviticus 19:9–10) authorized the poor to do so, but this right was dependent on the benevolence of the landowner. Boaz, was such a man, and he was also kindred to Naomi's belated husband, Elimelech. When he heard of the benevolent behaviour of Ruth towards Naomi, he decided to protect and to favour her. But the harvest was about to end and the future for both women remained uncertain. Naomi planned a strategy to resolve their situation. Following Naomi's instructions, Ruth embellished herself before going down to the field where Boaz was sleeping. She came in secretly and lay next to him. Boaz woke up in the middle of the night and perceived the presence of a woman. Ruth asked him for his protection and he covered her with his cloak. This action meant that Boaz understood the situation and agreed to marry her. Boaz took Ruth as his wife and they had a child whose

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<sup>1</sup> For a further development of this matter see "Memory and the Book" in Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 274–337.

name was Obed, which meant “Servant (of Yahweh)”. Obed was the father of Jesse and grandfather to David. Consequently, Naomi, who had been left without sons, became the great grandmother of King David.

The iconographic representation of the Book of Ruth, practically non-existent before the Middle Ages, underwent a remarkable development during this period alongside the increasing importance of illuminated Bibles. The Bibles Moralisesées<sup>2</sup> and the Historiated Bible of Padua (Padua, late 14<sup>th</sup> century, Rovigo, Accademia dei Concordi, Ms. 212, ff. 39r-45r) are among the most outstanding illuminated manuscripts in relation to the medieval representation of the Book of Ruth.

It was during the Romanesque Period that complete Bibles began to be created and, therefore, it became necessary to emphasize the beginning of each book to locate the different sections with ease. To do so, the initial of the *incipit* was decorated with either geometric, floriated and/or animal motifs. Later, figures or scenes were incorporated into these initials. The figures could represent the author or the protagonist of the story that was to follow. The scenes contained the most significant episodes of the story, which allowed the reader to recognize and recall the main events.<sup>3</sup> The following section will describe the different types of figures and scenes that appear in these initials.

## 2. The Historiated Initial Inhabited by one Character<sup>4</sup>

Initials that showed Ruth as a single figure became more frequently depicted during the Romanesque Period. Over time, the miniature acquired a greater prominence in the composition of the page and, next to the initial, there could be one or more miniatures detailing scenes from the Book of Ruth,<sup>5</sup> either as a single scene or as a cycle. In this case, we can also find Ruth in the initial, but when trying to discern the meaning of this image in this context, it must be done within the framework of the visual reading of the whole iconographic cycle.

### 2.1. The Figure of a Male in the Initial

In several instances the initial of the Book of Ruth is decorated with a male figure whose identification is the subject of much speculation. Cataloguers would describe him as an unidentified figure, or when they offer a proposal, it is always between question marks. In the Souvigny Bible (central France, late 12<sup>th</sup> century. Moulins, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 1, f. 90v) an initial with gold background shows a male holding a book which has also been gilded. The halo that

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<sup>2</sup> Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles Moralisesées II. The Book of Ruth*.

<sup>3</sup> Giordana Mariani, “La Bibbia: testo e immagine”, 224.

<sup>4</sup> A selection of the miniatures that have been studied in this article can be accessed through the personal page of the author at academia.edu.

<sup>5</sup> Three or four miniatures because the Book of Ruth is very short.

surrounds his head, his eyes raised to the sky and the golden colour are characteristic elements of the iconography of the prophets in the Byzantine tradition. In Christian Bibles, the Book of Ruth appears between the Book of Judges<sup>6</sup> and the Book of Samuel, to whose author tradition attributes it. This would suggest that the represented figure is the prophet Samuel, evoking the sacred character of the word of God.<sup>7</sup> Mention should also be made of a French Bible (Berry or Bourbonnais (?) Lyonnais (?), end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Bourges, BM 3, fol. 76r) where the initial is decorated with Elimelech depicted as a traveller.

## 2.2. Ruth's Representation as the Main Character in the Story

In some of the earliest illuminated manuscripts a small female figure appears in the initial which corresponds to Ruth.<sup>8</sup>

In the Romanesque Bible of Burgos (San Pedro de Cardeña (?), Spain, 1200–1250 (?), Provincial Library of Burgos, Ms. 173, f. 115r)<sup>9</sup> there is a thin, blonde figure, dressed in an elegant way according to the fashion of the time, with a small cap on her head that J. Yarza calls 'strange'. The bonnet is like the one worn by Boaz in the Baltimore Psalter (Oxford, 1230–1240. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery Ms. W.106, f. 18v), but different from the conical hat with which the Jews are represented in the Bibles *Moralisées* and later manuscripts. Similarly, the fabric of the dress, the stripes that make up the fabric and the shape of the belt, help to identify the character as belonging to a different religious group, alluding in this way to her

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the fact that the Book of Ruth narrates a story that takes place during the same period: "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land" (Ruth 1:1 KJV).

<sup>7</sup> Samuel also appears in the initial of another manuscript (Corbi, France, 1229. New York, PML MS 163, f. 80v), but in this case following a more Western iconography model. These characteristics are representative of a later period, instead of the neo-Byzantine character of the previous case. These are two similar examples that represent two different iconographical traditions.

<sup>8</sup> I have not taken into consideration some of the most important Romanesque Bibles produced in the Iberian Peninsula because the different initials on the biblical books remained undecorated. There are two Bibles from Catalonia (11<sup>th</sup> century), that is the Bible of Ripoll (Ciudad del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. lat. 5729, f. 93v) and the Bible of Rhoda (Paris, BnF, Ms. 36 Latin 6I, ff. 110v and 6IV, f. 1v). In the Ripoll Bible, the initial has been decorated with geometric motifs. In the Bible of Rhoda, there are two miniatures but they appear outside of the initial and without a frame. The first miniature shows Boaz moving towards Ruth, who is gleaning in the fields. It is with her that both the last column and the entire book closes. In the second miniature that can be seen at the beginning of the first column of the second volume, Boaz accepts Ruth and it leads into the Latin text of the Book of Ruth.

<sup>9</sup> The digital version of the manuscript is available in <http://bvpb.mcu.es/es/consulta/registro.cmd?id=485876> (Web 8 Apr. 2019). For a description of the miniatures in this Bible see Yarza, "Las miniaturas de la Biblia de Burgos", 185–203.

status as a Jew.<sup>10</sup> Inside the initial, other decorative elements are incorporated: two flowers in the upper border, one composed of four petals and another of eight, symbol of eternity and progeny, and a monstrous animal head, like those that appear in the genealogies at the beginning of the volume. Over the head of this beast rest the slippers of Ruth. It is a decorative composition with some complexity. The



Fig. 1: Ms.41, f.75v.

*incipit* of the Book of Ruth is the only case in this Bible in which the initial is occupied exclusively by a female figure.<sup>11</sup> In another Bible of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century (see Fig. 1)<sup>12</sup> Ruth is a stylized figure whose head is adorned with a ribbon. She wears a cloak of ermine and a blue tunic whose folds cling to the female body. As with the previous figure, she is blonde and with rosy cheeks adjusting to the ideal of beauty of the time. But the clothes and the ornaments point to a character of noble origin and belonging to a princely court, which was a characteristic of the linear Gothic style.

In some Bibles, the initial is part of a broader iconographic programme. The visual story begins with the initial and continues in the miniatures that illuminate the other pages containing the biblical text. An example of this can be seen at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the Porta Bible (Lausanne, France. Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne, Ms. U 964, ff. 84r–85r). The feminine figure of the initial (f. 84r) is located under an architectural structure. She has blonde hair, loose and uncovered. She wears a blue robe whose vibrant colour focuses the viewer's attention on the female body. As a minor detail, she carries in one of her hands a small red book (cf. *infra*). In this case the figure of Ruth occupies only the part of the initial that corresponds to the biblical text, extending towards the upper and lower left margin of the page. In

this Bible, the miniatures conform to the layout of the Latin text in two columns. In folio 84v, two of the scenes follow each other on the lower margin. Ruth gathering the ears of wheat after the reapers in the presence of Boaz, immediately after the day's work, delivers the grain to Naomi. In the following folio (85r), there is a

<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Santiago Manzarbeitia Valle for his valuable comments that have helped me during the study of this and other initials in the Book of Ruth.

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, only the first volume has been preserved (Genesis-Ezra). This is the reason why it is impossible to compare the initial in this manuscript where Ruth appears, with that of the rest of the books with a female character, such as the Book of Esther or the Book of Judith.

<sup>12</sup> North of France. Paris, BMaz, Ms. 41, f. 75v). In the identification of the manuscripts I have used the following abbreviations: BL (British Library), BMaz (Bibliothèque Mazarine), BnF (Bibliothèque nationale de France), and PML (Pierpont Morgan Library).



single scene under the left column as the first Book of Samuel begins at the end of the right column. This scene is known as *halitzah* (Ruth 4:8) in which the relative renounces his right of rescue and symbolizes this by taking off his footwear and giving it to Ruth. Therefore, in the Bible of Porta, Ruth's story is depicted by choosing scenes that represent the beginning of the story (the protagonist), the middle (harvesting scenes) and the end (the delivery of the shoe).

The same is true of the Historiated Bible of Guyart des Moulins (Utrecht, The Netherlands, 1430. The Hague, Rijksmuseum Meermanno Westreenianum, Ms. 78D 38I, ff. 156r–158r). Since this is a later Bible, the initial is wider and it has now acquired a square format. In this case, Ruth is wearing another type of head-dress and attire, but she is still blonde and her figure is set against a landscaped background (f. 156r). Each folio of the Book of Ruth is illuminated with a framed miniature and placed inside the text forming a series of four scenes to which the initial one must be added: Orpah leaves Ruth and Naomi (f. 156v), Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz (f. 157r), Boaz giving Ruth six measures of barley (f. 157v) and finally, the redeemer (*goel*) barefoot in front of Boaz and Ruth (f. 158r). In this Bible, the same scenes are used for the iconographic representation of the beginning and the end, but the central part of the story uses three different scenes that reproduce some of the most significant episodes of this part of the book.

There are two other representations that deserve attention. The first comes from a Bible created in the north of Italy (late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Paris. Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève, Ms. 1182, f. 97r). In this Bible, Ruth has her head bare, but her hair is short and her face is not visible. She is barefoot, which is rare, as she usually wears a pair of slippers. In this miniature, Ruth does not stand out because of her beauty but rather she is represented with common features. The second image shows Ruth outside the initial, as an extension of it. This is the case in an English Bible of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (London, BL, Harley Ms. 2814, f. 119r) where the female figure constitutes an expansion of the initial formed by a hybrid creature. It is possible that it was the hand of the same scribe that also made the initial. The absence of a frame allowed the artist greater freedom. The drawing is made in black, and coloured with dark tones: brown for the dress, the cap and the hair, and black for the slippers, leaving the natural tone of the folio for the skin. Although the colour has little relevance, the miniaturist managed to give the image great expressiveness through the gestures of the face, the wave of the hair and the folds of the tunic, creating an impressive sensation of movement.

Ruth is also depicted carrying a book in her hands. Prophets, sibyls, and evangelists often hold a book in their hands as a symbol of knowledge and authorship. In a manuscript of the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century (Vendome or Bourges. Paris, Library of the Chamber of deputies, Ms. 2, f. 65r),<sup>13</sup> the figure of Ruth, whose head is cov-

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cahn, *Romanesque Manuscripts*, 274–75.

ered by a veil, is projected onto a golden background. She carries in her hand a book with a white cover and golden pages which is conspicuous since it contrasts with the green colours of the tunic and the red of the mantle. The golden colour emphasizes divine authority and the book symbolizes the wisdom and the word of God. When Ruth carries a book in her hands, she is evoking the relationship between the character and the biblical book and, at the same time, drawing attention to the Holy Scripture as a source of knowledge and revelation. It has already been noted that in the Bible of Porta, Ruth carries a book. This same meaning is found in the phylactery that a female figure holds in one hand while raising the other (Angers, France, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. London, BL, Harley Ms. 2833, f. 131v). Once more the initial is set against a gold background and Ruth looks straight at the reader. The image evokes the fusion between the protagonist and the biblical book as the word that is revealed.

### 2.3 Typological and Allegorical Meaning of Ruth

In the Middle Ages the Book of Ruth is closely connected to the genealogy described by Matthew 1:1–17, where the protagonist (Matthew 1:5) appears alongside other significant women among the ancestors of Christ. In the Middle Ages, the Tree of Jesse was frequently depicted to signify the human character of Christ and his relationship with the kings of Israel. A trunk emerges from Jesse, who is lying down, that culminates in the figure of Christ. Some of Christ's ancestors appear on this trunk and its branches such as David, Solomon, and Mary.

The Church Fathers saw in Ruth the symbol of those who recognize the truth of the Gospel without being Jews and presented her as the prefiguration of the Church of the Gentiles. This interpretation is mentioned by Origen in his *Catena in Ruth* (PG 12, col. 989),<sup>14</sup> by Ambrose of Milan in the *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, Book III §30 (PL 25, col. 1601–2), John Chrysostom in the *Homilies on Matthew* III, 4 (PG 57, col. 35–36), and by Isidore of Seville, in the *Commentary to Ruth* 9:1–2 included in the *Questions on the Octateuch*<sup>15</sup> (PL 83, col 390–91). Theodoret of Cyrus in the *Questions on the Octateuch* (PG 80, 521–524) saw Ruth as a prefiguration and proclamation of the coming of Christ. These interpretations continued among the medieval exegetes.

In the Voralpe Bible (Austria, late 12<sup>th</sup> century. Voralpe Stiftsbibliothek, Ms. 95, f. 119r), we find a woman with a crown over her head inside a tree structure that suggests the iconography of the Tree of Jesse. One of the iconographic traditions of this motif presents a rod (*virga*) that is associated with the figure of the Virgin (*Virgo*) standing, in prayer or enthroned that can occupy the entire space of the

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<sup>14</sup> With the abbreviations of PG and PL, we are referring respectively to, Migne, *Patrologia Cursus Completus. Series Latina* and Migne, *Patrologia Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*.

<sup>15</sup> Petruccione / Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus* 363–373.



tree trunk and even replace it.<sup>16</sup> Mirella Levi D'Ancona<sup>17</sup> identifies this image as Ruth, symbol of the Church. The iconographic characteristics of this female figure suggest to the reader both aspects, which are closely related, and which, probably, taking into consideration the medieval mentality, cannot be considered independent realities. This is another symbolic element that allows the reader to identify the same allegorical meaning. This relationship is strengthened if we look at the Bible of Heisterbach (Cologne (?), Germany, 1240. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. theol. Lat. 20 379, f. 108v), where the initial occupies practically the entire length of the folio. It is decorated with flourishes, whose iconography is very similar to that of the Tree of Jesse, inside which appears a biblical king, most probably David. The choice of David's character to illustrate the opening of the Book of Ruth underscores the close relationship between the two characters and emphasizes Ruth's role in David's dynasty as an implicit allusion to the genealogy described by Matthew.

This same meaning can be attributed to Ruth in the Bible of Lyon (last quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Lyon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 410, f. 101r), where she appears with dark long hair and with a sceptre in her hands. The golden background and the body posture identify the figure as someone of authority<sup>18</sup> who most likely represents the Church. In the Bible of St. Thierry (Champagne, France, 12<sup>th</sup> century. Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 22, f. 118v) Ruth is placed against an architectural structure. She holds in one hand a spherical object and in the other a curved object that looks like a sickle. The latter instrument would allude to Ruth's role as a gleaner. It is not easy to identify the spherical object but perhaps it could be a sharpening stone. In that case, there would be two elements that allow us to associate this figure with Ruth. At the same time, the woman has her head covered and she has a halo, emphasizing the authority of the character. What we could have here is a conflation of meanings: Ruth, the gleaner who, in turn, is the prefiguration of the Church. Therefore, diverse objects such as a crown, a spherical object or a sickle can have the same evocative and symbolic capacity and refer the reader to an allegorical meaning of Ruth.

A less conventional representation, less easy to identify, is an initial in the Book of Ruth in a French Bible created in Limousin in the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Paris, BMaz, Ms. 1, f. 82r.). In this Bible, Ruth is standing while holding a pennant, which leads Cahn to interpret the image as an allegory of the Church,<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Manzarbeitia, "El árbol de Jesé" 3. (Web 8 Apr. 2019).

<sup>17</sup> In Levi d'Ancona, "Figurazioni del libro di Ruth nella Bibbia" 11.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. supra regarding Samuel in the initial.

<sup>19</sup> See the catalog entry in [http://www.enluminures.culture.fr/public/mistral/enlumine\\_fr](http://www.enluminures.culture.fr/public/mistral/enlumine_fr) (Web 8 Apr. 2019).

while Garnier, understanding the spear as an attribute of the warrior, identifies her as a warrior heroine.<sup>20</sup>

As already mentioned in the 5<sup>th</sup> century Theodoret of Cyrus had described Ruth as the prefiguration of the coming of Christ. This bond between the Virgin and Ruth through motherhood is accentuated by the increase in the devotion to the Virgin Mary which starts in the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>21</sup>. In the beginning, Ruth can be seen carrying her son Obed in her arms in an iconographic composition very similar to the one of the Virgin Mary and her Child: a woman with covered head carries in her arms a young child. As examples, we can mention several Central European Bibles: the Stavelot Bible (Liège, Belgium, 1093–97. London, BL, Add. Ms. 28106, f. 92v.), The Augsburg Bible or Riesenbibel (Regensburg, ca. 1200. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Clm. 3901, f. 57r) and the Goderamnus Bible<sup>22</sup> (cf. Lobbes, Germany, 1084. Tournai Priest Seminary, France, Ms. 1, f. 113v). In the last manuscript, above the figures, the names of Ruth and Obed have been written. The form of the initial takes the shape of an architectural structure above which a church is projected. Through the building of the church and the child in her arms the reader is intended to recall the allegorical interpretations of Ruth.

### 3. The Historiated Initial with Narrative Scenes

The historiated initial may show one scene or may include an iconographical cycle composed of several scenes.

#### 3.1. The Initial Includes One Narrative Scene

Undoubtedly the scene of Ruth that was most represented in the Middle Ages and clearly dominant up until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons departing Bethlehem in the direction of Moab. This scene is also known as the *Peregrinatio* for its resemblance to a journey or pilgrimage.<sup>23</sup> Through rods, bundles hanging from a cane or rod carried on the shoulders, wineskins and other elements necessary to undertake a journey, the reader can interpret the meaning of the image and identify it as the introduction of the story. Pilgrimage was of major importance in the Middle Ages. The journeys to Jerusalem, Rome or/and St. James of Compostela as main shrines, together with many others of local sig-

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<sup>20</sup> “L’heroïne est représentée en guerrière tenant la lancè gonfanon de la main gauche, la main drotie sur la cuissé” Garnier, *Le langage d’image au Moyen Age*, 127. For this author, the body posture of the feminine figure transmits strength and determination.

<sup>21</sup> Godofredo, Abad de Admont presents Ruth as the prefiguration of the Virgin Mary in Migne, PL 174, col. 1026, §568.

<sup>22</sup> The name comes from the scribe-illuminator. This Bible is also known as the Lobbes Bible.

<sup>23</sup> Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles Moralisesées II. The Book of Ruth*, 28. 257. This scene also shows certain similarities with the Flight to Egypt of the Holy Family (Matthew 2:13–15).

nificance were not only a religious expression; they also facilitated trade and helped to create a sense of collective identity. This connection is clearly perceived in an initial where Elimelech takes on the symbol of the pilgrim to St. James of Compostela: the shell (Paris, 1220–1230. Paris, BMaz, Ms. 18, f. 72v).<sup>24</sup> Elimelech alone in the *Peregrinatio* is a strange occurrence. It can be seen in the Conradin Bible (South of Italy, ca. 1260. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, Ms. 152, f. 104r). In a monograph about this manuscript Rebecca Wells Corrie considers that since the initial is located in one of the mutilated folios of this Bible, the image could be incomplete. While there is reason to believe that the missing figures from the margin of the Conradin Bible are Naomi and her sons, it is possible that the margin contained another sequence from the story of Ruth which is known in a few profusely illustrated cycles in Western manuscripts (181).

On the same page, Corrie cites another manuscript (Bodleian Library, Ms. Canon. Bib. lat. 56) in which the figure of Elimelech also appears without his family. Unfortunately, it has been almost impossible to locate this image. In another Bible (Berry or Bourbonnais, France, 12<sup>th</sup> century. Bourges BM 0003, f. 76r) Elimelech is represented following a slightly different iconographic model. The architectural structure upon his head is omitted and the character, who has a long beard, is looking directly to the viewer.



Fig. 2: Ms.1181, f.80r.

The first time that the scene of *Peregrinatio* was seen<sup>25</sup> is in the Bible of Montpellier (Languedoc, France, ca. 1120. London, BL, Harley Ms. 4772, f. 120v), where the four family members appear inside a medallion in the centre of the initial, intertwined with a profuse geometric decoration and with sirens or hybrids. The representation of this scene could have different compositions.<sup>26</sup> The biblical text does not provide any information regarding the age of the children, which could have given rise to representing them as babies, young children, or even adolescents. Elimelech and Naomi can walk together with or without their children. Given the shape of the letter *I*, often the scene is divided into two registers: Elimelech can occupy the upper register and Naomi the lower (see Fig. 2).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Corrie, *The Conradin Bible*, Ms. 152, I would like to thank Rebecca Corrie for sending me her PhD. Dissertation.

<sup>25</sup> Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles Moralised II. The Book of Ruth*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding the Byzantine origin of the representation and the topoi of the *Peregrinatio* cf. Corrie, *The Conradin Bible*, Ms. 152, 180–87.

<sup>27</sup> *Peregrinatio*. France du Nord, 13<sup>th</sup> century. Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève Ms.1181, f. 80r.



Fig. 3: Ms.1185, f.74v.

The city of Bethlehem, starting point of the trip, can be symbolized by a small tower at the top of the initial. Very often, the two children are represented accompanying their mother.<sup>28</sup> Naomi can hold hands with one and carry the other in her arms or on her shoulders, but at other times both boys walk with her, carrying also their staffs. There are manuscripts in which each child walks alongside one of their parents and even the parents can appear on the upper registers and the children on the bottom. These are highly common variants within a standard iconographic scene. In most of the cases appear some architectural elements such as arches or a tower in allusion to the departure from Moab.

In Fig. 3<sup>29</sup> the children are outside the letter *I*, the pilgrims are facing outwards and their staffs are beyond the text block. This is very interesting because the artist could incorporate the staffs within the margins. Lucy Freeman Sandler has studied the instances where the artist goes beyond the text block and according to her theory,<sup>30</sup> this would give huge importance to the symbolism of these staffs, a symbolism that would be clear for the reader/viewer.

The Italian Bibles of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century present greater freedom, showing the arrival at Moab, which corresponds to the end of the journey rather than the journey itself and are also

<sup>28</sup> Within these variants in the scene, Elimelech can appear alone and Naomi next to one of her two children. In this case the miniature shows a departure from the narrative, omitting the presence of the second child. A curious variant that I have only found in one manuscript (Paris, 1250–1275, New York, PML, Ms. M. 970, f. 86v) consists of arranging the scene into three registers: Elimelech on one, Naomi with one of his children on the other and, finally, the second child alone on the third. In addition, articulated in three medallions, the scene of the *Peregrinatio* can be found in a French codex of the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century (Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 28, f. 108v). The initial is crowned by a church. Underneath, Naomi holds in one hand a ball of thread and in the other a spindle, an unusual motif which also appears in the Padua Bible. The second medallion contains the image of Elimelech and the third, the two children. The iconographic composition is very similar to that of other Bibles of the 12<sup>th</sup> century coming from Champagne. Probably, the spindle is taken from the iconography of Eve. When God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, he gave them clothes and working tools: a spade to Adam and a spindle to Eve. Cf. Réau, *Iconografía del arte cristiano*, 117–18.

<sup>29</sup> *Peregrinatio*; France du Nord, 1220–1230. Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève Ms. 1185, f. 74v.

<sup>30</sup> “In the context of medieval book illumination ‘embedded marginalia’ appears to be a contradiction in terms, yet the phrase may be used to refer to images on the manuscript page that are beyond the text block in both a physical and conceptual sense but integrated nevertheless in the form and meaning of the page as a whole.” Sandler, “Embedded Marginalia”, 1 (Web 8 Apr. 2019).

more innovative in the layout of the scene. The initial is extended horizontally and Naomi and Elimelech are each under a parallel arch (Bologna / Emilia Romagna, 1265–1275. PML, Ms. G. 38 I, f. 105r), or the entry into Moab could be located below the initial which takes the form of a column (Palermo (?), Italy, 1300–1324. New York, PML, Ms. G. 60, f. 144v). In this Bible, a new element is also incorporated: some mountains are represented on the left side of the composition. There are also mountains in another Italian Bible (Bologna, Italy, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. London, BL, Add. Ms. 18720, f. 104r), this time to separate Elimelech from Naomi and her children, although a visual contact is established between them by having them looking at each other.

As we enter the Late Middle Ages, the miniature begins to be independent of the initial, but still accompanies it. The artist now has a wider and square space, so it is no longer necessary to divide the initial into two registers, so the artist can have the four members of the family embarking on the journey together.

Although the departure from Bethlehem is the scene of reference, in some manuscripts we find other episodes. In these new initials, the representation of Ruth participating in the gleaning becomes more popular starting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In a more open space, the scene incorporates other gleaners. In the previous centuries, this episode formed part of a cycle within the historiated initials next to other scenes. It uses an iconographic tradition in which Ruth is bent to pick up the wheat-ears, carrying a small sheaf in her hands.

To a lesser extent, some of the initials contain scenes that depict the end of the story. The Bible of Vivien, also known as the Bible of Charles the Bald (Tours, 846. Paris, BnF, Ms. Par. Lat. 1, f. 88v) corresponds to the Carolingian period and shows a pronounced Byzantine influence. Inside the initial, Naomi is sitting carrying Obed in her arms and on top of the letter *I*, Ruth stands with halo and Boaz appears dressed in a golden robe and sitting on a throne with a sceptre in his hand. Both figures are connected by a phylactery and all the characters are identified by their name. It depicts their marriage and offspring, highlighting the role of their children in the genealogy of David. The figures are somewhat simple and schematic, but they carry great symbolic weight. The choice of this scene from the Book of Ruth is not accidental as it is especially significant for the Carolingian monarchy. Boaz is characterized as a late Roman emperor. The phylactery that unites Ruth and Boaz symbolizes the connection between the Church (Ruth) and the State (Boaz), so that religious power, the Church, legitimizes political power, the king and the authority of the emperor which goes back to King David. It would be important to recall that in the Middle Ages King David was the model of medieval monarchs. The interpretative keys to understanding this representation are found in the way of understanding the Old Testament, a narrative that is updated and applied to the reality of the moment, which could be classified as a contextualized reading following a visual key.



The episode in which Ruth comes at night to the fields and lies at the feet of Boaz's bed to ask for his protection and to invite him to take charge of her future (Ruth 3:7–15) appears in a sequence of several miniatures, forming a continuous narrative. It appears as such in the Arsenal Bible (San Juan de Acre, 1250–1254. Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Ms. 5211, f. 364v) or in the Morgan Crusader's Bible (Paris, ca. 1240–1250. New York, PML, Ms. M. 638, f. 18r), nevertheless it is unusual to find it within the historiated initial.<sup>31</sup> The narrow and elongated form of the initial conditioned the arrangement of the figures and forced a vertical composition. In a French Bible of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 76 F 23, f. 64v) the representation follows quite faithfully the biblical text: "And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lay down at the end of the grain pile: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and lay down" (Ruth 3:7 KJV).

Ruth appears uncovering the feet of Boaz in the field and at the feet of Ruth is a dog, a symbol of fidelity. Ruth, therefore, takes the place of the dog, which is at the feet of its master, and displaces the animal, thus emphasizing the value of the gesture of the woman. Of a later date, at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Bohemia or Prague, 1391. New York, PML, Ms. M. 833, f. 88r), is the initial / on which a bed on which both sleep is incorporated. The scene has a familiar character, where Ruth and Boaz are shown as husband and wife who share their bed and sleep together – a scene more appropriate to interior of a house than to an open field. In this manuscript the scene is devoid of any erotic nuances.<sup>32</sup> Due to the lack of space of the initial the bed protrudes from the limits of the initial /. Two Bibles of the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and originating in the same geographical area (Champagne, France) present two *incipit* that follow the same iconographic disposition in which this same scene also appears (Paris, BnF, Ms. Latin 11535, f. 144r<sup>33</sup> and the Manerius Bible, Paris, Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève, Ms. 8, f. 174r). These two are rectangular initials with floriated decoration in their interior that extend to the superior part of the folio forming a right angle. The first medallion houses the scene of the *Peregrinatio* and in the second a man appears lying on a bed with a woman's head at his feet.<sup>34</sup> The third medallion is not inhabited. In both cases the iconographic model is practically identical.

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<sup>31</sup> This scene also appears in the Munich Psalter (Gloucester (?), England, 13<sup>th</sup> century. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 835, f. 104v).

<sup>32</sup> Regarding the iconographic variants of this scene cf. Seijas, "Rut" 86–87 (Web 8 Apr. 2019).

<sup>33</sup> In Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles Moralised II. The Book of Ruth*. Fig. 14, 31.

<sup>34</sup> The catalogue entry of the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Saint Geneviève through the digital portal Liber Floridus [http://www.enluminures.culture.fr/public/mistral/enlumine\\_fr](http://www.enluminures.culture.fr/public/mistral/enlumine_fr) (Web 8 Apr. 2019) identifies it as such. Nevertheless, W. Cahn, *Romanesque Manuscripts 99* describes it as:



### 3.2. Iconographical Cycles Composed of Two or Three Scenes

The letter / facilitates the inclusion of several illuminations in the initial. The scenes selected in each manuscript conditioned the resulting visual story in each case.<sup>35</sup> The initial is usually divided in two or three registers and it is common to see it take the shape of an architectural structure with arches that define each episode. In several manuscripts, we find a similar iconographic composition formed by the *Peregrinatio*, Naomi, and Ruth.

The departure from Bethlehem is not represented by the couple and their sons embarking on the journey, but by two or three heads, whether male or female, each placed under an arch. It is not easy to identify the figures, although the cataloguers agree that it must be connected to the *Peregrinatio*. However, it is very probable that for the reader this scene evoked the beginnings of a story in the broader sense: the outward journey and the death of the husband and children of Naomi. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Naomi appears on the next scene, whose clothes are distinguished from those of Ruth, holding her dress in a gesture that aids in walking. The third register is occupied by Ruth gleanings and holding some wheat-ears (see Fig. 4).<sup>36</sup> The episodes chosen correspond to the first part of the story and are influenced by the two women. This visual reading is even more evident in another manuscript (France, 13<sup>th</sup> century, Orleans, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 7, f. 133v.), which lacks the *Peregrinatio* and in which no man appears. In the first register Ruth accompanies Naomi on the return trip and in the second, Ruth picks up the ears of wheat in the field.

It is worth mentioning two Italian Bibles from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Their composition is very similar. In both cases the initial adopts an architectural structure that ends with a gable roof. In the first register the most common iconography of the *Peregrinatio* has



Fig. 4: Ms.135, f.111r.

“medallions of Ruth and Elimelech on their way to Moab, death of Elimelech, Luxuria with snakes at her breast”. In my opinion Luxuria can be closely connected with the bed scene between Ruth and Boaz. Cahn catalogued (cat. 92) the scene in the BNF, Ms Latin 11535 entry the same way.  
<sup>35</sup> Some manuscripts use this iconography to present one single scene in two levels. In addition to the examples already mentioned in relation to the *Peregrinatio*, it is possible to mention the return of Orpah while Naomi and Ruth continue to follow the path together (Paris, 1250–1300, The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Ms. 133 D 25, f. 73v) and Boaz watching Ruth while she gleanes he fields (13<sup>th</sup> century. Paris, BMaz, Ms. 15, f. 95v).

<sup>36</sup> Glossed Bible, France du Nord, ca. 1210. Paris, BMaz, Ms.135, f. 111r.

been recovered with a couple in the centre accompanied by the two young children. In the lower register, Naomi appears at the centre laying her hands on the two figures that appear to each one of her sides. In the first case (Bologna, Italy ca. 1280. Paris, BnF, Ms. Latin 18, f. 81v), Naomi is between her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Corrie argues that a relationship can be established between both images from the Arsenal Bible.<sup>37</sup> Folio 364v is composed of six miniatures arranged in two columns of three scenes each. On the ones on the left, we can see the *Peregrinatio*, Orpah's farewell of Naomi and Ruth, and Ruth uncovering the feet of Boaz in the fields. In the second manuscript (Bologna, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Oxford, Bodelian Library, Ms. Canon. Bib. Lat. 57, f. 94v), Naomi stands with her hands on the shoulders of Ruth and Boaz, representing the marriage of both. Therefore, with a very similar compositional formula, it is possible to identify two different readings. While the first manuscript focuses on the first chapter of the Book of Ruth, the second represents an overview of the story by including a scene from the beginning and another from the end.

### 3.3. Iconographical Cycles Composed of more than Three Scenes

Two other initials are especially interesting because of the high number of scenes that they contain; the initial takes up the entire intercolumnar space of the folio. The first is a 13<sup>th</sup> century French Bible (1251–1275. Stuttgarter Landesbibliothek, Cod. bib. 4<sup>o</sup> 8, f. 90v). This initial contains five scenes, but not all of them occupy the same space, the first scene being clearly smaller: 1) Naomi and Orpah, 2) Naomi followed by Ruth heading for Bethlehem, 3) and 4) are two similar scenes in which a man carries a sickle in his right hand and holds a wheat sheaf with his left. The first may correspond to Boaz, ordering his servants to leave the ears of wheat on the ground and the second could represent the execution of the order by the servant, and 5) Ruth gleaning, to which the artist assigns a larger space. The last three scenes show a very similar composition. In the case of the male, the character is oriented to the right and holds with one hand a sickle and with the other a wheat sheaf. In the case of Ruth, and following the traditional representation, she holds the ears of wheat next to her body. This initial recalls the initials composed of two or three scenes but, in this case, the iconographic cycle is extended to include Boaz and his servant and it pays greater attention to agricultural tasks. This emphasis is completely absent in the last initial that will be discussed in this work. This manuscript is part of a series of four fragments (New York, PML, Ms. M. 851<sup>38</sup>) that came from a single French Bible (New York, PML, Ms. 109) dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1260). The initial / that accompanies the beginning of the Book of Ruth corresponds to the f. 127v. It is a very long initial that

<sup>37</sup> Corrie, *The Conradin Bible*, Ms. 152, 185.

<sup>38</sup> The initial is located in the first fragment.

also occupies the intercolumnar space of the whole folio separating the text from the end of the Book of Judges (left column) from the text of the Book of Ruth (right column). The initial is composed of several registers, which allows the reader to establish a reading following the images: 1) and 2) correspond to the *Peregrinatio*. On this occasion, the representation shows Naomi alone carrying a bundle hanging from a rod that rests on her shoulder and below are her two teenage children carrying walking staffs. This scene leaves out the figure of Elimelech. 3) Ruth, dressed in blue and Orpah dressed in a lighter tone garment. The two colours point to two different attitudes. Their body language and their reciprocal looks represent their farewell. 4) Ruth follows Naomi on her journey to Bethlehem. 5) Boaz, wearing a pointed hat, similar to the one that characterizes the Jews in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Bibles, and Ruth are holding hands to signify the scene of their marriage, 6) and 7) represent Obed, the son of both, and Jesse, son of this and father of David. Each one of them carries a halo and a phylactery with their name that facilitates identification. The reader who contemplates these miniatures may see that the visual story focuses on the beginning of the story (Ruth 1) with special attention to the round trip and the importance of the female characters: Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth. The detail with which this first part of the story is represented is then interrupted. All reference to the reaping scene disappears – unlike in the previous example – and goes straight to the ending. The marriage of Obed and Ruth and her descendants, through Obed and Jesse, comes to David, from whose lineage Jesus, will be born. The end of the Book of Ruth is shown by means of three images, emphasizing its importance and transcendence. Therefore, in this iconography the imprint of the genealogy of Matthew is clearly seen in which Ruth is mentioned as a significant woman for the rise of the Davidic dynasty from which Jesus emerged.

#### 4. Conclusion

Having analyzed the figures and scenes that appear in the initials on the *incipit* of the Book of Ruth in illuminated medieval Bibles, we can see that the miniatures have a double function: they are ornamental and they are meant to convey a meaning, and following the latter, the images could transmit not one, but several meanings at the same time.

On a few occasions, the initial may show the author of this biblical narrative, which according to tradition was the prophet Samuel. Ruth is represented as the protagonist of the story, but her figure is also associated with a typological and allegorical sense proper to medieval biblical exegesis. Ruth is part of David's genealogy. As the mother of Obed, she is closely associated with the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, being her prefiguration and a symbol of the announcement of the coming of Christ. And at the same time, being a foreigner who settled in Judah,

she became the prefiguration of the Church of the Gentiles, that is those who, without being Jews, recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Different iconographic elements allow the reader to connect with the medieval understanding of the story as the church represented by architectural structures or with a crown on Ruth's head, a child in the arms or elements of the iconography of the tree of Jesse.

In iconographic cycles composed of several scenes the reader's visual understanding may be conditioned by the selection of the episodes. In each manuscript, the creators choose to incorporate some episodes and to silence others and, consequently, the attention is focused on the beginning (*Peregrinatio*, separation, return), the middle of the story (the harvesting scenes) or the end of the story (the marriage), resulting in a different meaning in each case. In addition, there are several examples of initials with two or three scenes where only women appear or, at least, they are the most important figures. This predominance of female figures also plays a role in the visual understanding of the story underlying the women protagonists and their relevance in this book.

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