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## »Treading« in the Book of Ruth

**Calum M. Carmichael**

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Bearbeitung an. Der Text wurde als Wort des personifizierten Volkes Israel verstanden und daraufhin durch Hinzufügung des Namens »Israel« in v.3, ferner durch die v.4b.5aδ.5b und das ansetzende Verb von v.6aδ abgerundet.

## »Treading« in the Book of Ruth

By Calum M. Carmichael

(Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y. 14853)

A single observation sometimes proves crucial in the illumination of an entire literary work. This is the case, I submit, in a correct understanding of the book of Ruth. Such recent work as the commentaries of H. W. Hertzberg, W. Rudolph, and E. F. Campbell has emphasized the pronounced sexual symbolism in Ruth 3, the scene in which Ruth visits Boaz, at midnight, at his threshing-floor, after he has eaten and drunk and is merry, lies down beside him and uncovers his feet<sup>1</sup>. The repetition in this chapter of the words »to lie down«, »to know«, and »to come (toward), to go into« is intended to reinforce their double meaning and direct attention to the sexual domain. In particular, the uncovering of the man's feet or legs is also an allusion to his genital region. »Feet« in Hebrew is frequently employed in this way, the context determining whether the non-literal sense also, or only, applies. I claim to have demonstrated in a recent publication that Ruth's gesture in lying down and uncovering Boaz's feet is to the end that he will put her on as his new footwear. She is to be his sandal, an object which in most cultures is used suggestively of the female genitals, and becomes symbolic of a woman<sup>2</sup>. The formal ceremony involving the sandal at the public gate (Ruth 47-10) only becomes intelligible once Ruth's »san-

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth*, ATD 9, 1959<sup>2</sup>, 274-275; W. Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohe Lied, Die Klagelieder*, KAT 17/1-3, 1962, 54-56; E. F. Campbell, *Ruth*, AB, 1975, 131-132.

<sup>2</sup> C. M. Carmichael, *A Ceremonial Crux: Removing a Man's Sandal as a Female Gesture of Contempt*, JBL 96 (1977), 321-336. — On the significance of the golden slipper in Cinderella, see B. Bettelheim's recent study, mainly from a psychoanalytic viewpoint but also with awareness of the symbol in folklore, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 1976, 264-277. Professor H. Shadick, emeritus Professor of Chinese Literature at Cornell, drew my attention to some examples of erotic sandal symbolism in Chinese folklore. Among the Manchus a bride gives gifts of shoes to her husband's brothers. Group marriage exists in that all of the younger brothers have the right of physical access to the wives of the elder brothers. The shoes are ornamented with *liet hua*, which in common speech is the vulgar term for the female genitalia. See R. D. Jamieson, *Three Lectures on Chinese Folklore*, 1932, 75.

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Science and technology for water purification in the coming decades, the Association, as follows from the system of equations, perfectly characterizes the complex of a priori bisexuality, with nanoscale particles of gold creating a micelle.

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