This addition to the TEAMS Commentary Series aims to present classroom readers with a representative collection of translations of medieval Latin commentaries on the book of Ruth. Instructors who might consider this volume for a course on Biblical interpretation will be grateful that the reading selections include not only some of the most important examples of medieval commentaries on Ruth, but of Biblical exegesis in general from the Middle Ages. Jerome, The Ordinary Gloss, Peter Comestor, Hugh of St. Cher, and Nicholas of Lyra—all were influential in the history of medieval commentary on Scriptures. Smith’s selection of texts to translate and her prefatory remarks, thus, are consciously designed as a brief introduction to medieval Biblical commentary altogether. What is unusual about the list of exegetes included here is that it reflects a high degree of Jewish influence on medieval Biblical interpretation and does not contain material by Augustine of Hippo. Christian authors were attracted more to the hermeneutic problems posed by Ruth than to doctrinal issues. Jewish commentators offered them more keys to unlock the literal level of the book of Ruth than did Augustine.

In the volume’s Introduction, Smith is careful to situate the book of Ruth in Jewish culture as well as in the exegetical history of the Christian Middle Ages. Thus, she notes that for Jewish readers, Ruth is important because she is the great-grandmother of King David (p. ix), although Smith might have gone on to emphasize that David’s genealogy is of vital interest not simply because he was Israel’s greatest king, but because the messiah will descend from his familial line. Smith’s analysis of the book of Ruth is sensitive and will be a useful tool for those studying this text as literature. Readers will especially appreciate her handling of the themes of the narrative, its incorporation of sexuality, the methods used by medieval exegetes to treat the book’s sexual elements, and their answers to four of the text’s most enduring problems: 1) when did the story take place and who are its dramatis personae, 2) what happens on the threshing floor, 3) how did the sandal ceremony function, and 4) what purpose is served by the book as a whole. The Introduction also contains brief descriptions of the eleven different commentators or books of exegesis represented in the reading selections (pp. xiii–xviii) and an overview of medieval Biblical commentary, in particular the scholastic theory of the fourfold method and the actual practice of exegetes which generally divided the text only into a literal and a spiritual sense (pp. xviii–xix).

The Latin texts chosen for use here are frequently accessible only in early printed editions or manuscripts, though The Ordinary Gloss is available in a facsimile of its earliest printing (Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria, facsimile reprint of the Editio Princeps of Adolph Rusch [Strasbourg, 1480/81], introduction by Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson [Turnhout: Brepols, 1992]). It is unclear why Smith has chosen a very rare and late copy of the Gloss as the text to translate (Lyons, 1589), particularly since she herself notes that after 1500, editions of the Gloss are filled with
interpolations and make unreliable witnesses to the original work. The postills of Nicholas of Lyra could have been taken from this later print, but the Glossa Ordinaria represented by the more accessible and authentic facsimile reprint. Smith’s translations are accurate and remain faithfully close to the original, but in some cases the bibliographic notice of the location of their source text needs to be modified. Thus, Smith notes correctly that the selections from Rabanus adopted by the Gloss are rarely quoted verbatim (p. xv), but this fact is not immediately apparent on the pages containing her translation, where it could have been indicated by a ‘cf.’ or ‘compare’ before the references to the PL volume containing Rabanus’s commentary. Furthermore, additions to The Ordinary Gloss from Jerome’s Quaestiones Hebraicae in Paralipomenon are incorrectly identified here (p. 31) from PL 23:1368 and 1373; they are instead located in PL 23:1433 and 1438, respectively. Such oversights do not mar the overall usefulness of this text for classroom instruction as an excellent introduction to the medieval exegesis of the book of Ruth.

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