

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE AUTHORITY OF 4 EZRA AND THE JEWISH ORIGIN OF (NATIVE) AMERICAN INDIANS

While wondering about a topic for the volume in honour of Prof. Jesús González Luis, who became a close friend when we were together in Jerusalem in what now seems the distant past and through whom I discovered the Canaries, I suddenly thought of returning to a theme that I had discussed recently in a Festschrift for a colleague from Salamanca. This was the authority of 4 Ezra in Spain and its influence on the discovery of America¹—not only for the well-known connections of the Canaries with the discovery of America, but also because a Bishop of the Canaries (Antonio de la Cruz) was among those who opposed the decision of the fourth session of the Council of Trent, on the 8th of April, 1548, not to include 4 Ezra among the canonical books. The opinion of the Bishop of the Canaries is clear: “*Placent decreta, Unum tamen addam, ne libri Esdrae deleantur de suo loco.*”² In spite of the efforts of Antonio de la Cruz, the decision of the Council was to remove 4 Ezra from its traditional position between the books of Nehemiah and Tobias, where it appears in mediaeval manuscripts, and to relegate it to an appendix, resulting in its progressive loss of authority.

As a token of my friendship with Prof. Jesús González Luis, who is from the Canaries, I have wished to focus on one element of 4 Ezra which I did not discuss in detail in my previous study: the influence of this apocryphal book in the debate on the Jewish origin of the American Indians. It is not a completely new topic and has been discussed in detail recently by Francis Schmidt,³ but it is sufficiently unusual for us to consider it a little more.

¹ F. García Martínez, “La autoridad de 4 Esdras y el descubrimiento de América.” Published above as ch. 10, “The Authority of 4 Ezra and the Discovery of America.”

² *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, Actorum, Epistularum, Tractatum: Nova Collectio* (ed. S. Merkle; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1901–1938), 5:87.

³ F. Schmidt, “Arzareth en Amérique: L’autorité du *Quatrième Livre d’Esdras* dans la discussion sur la parenté des juifs et des Indiens d’Amérique (1530–1729),” in *Moïse géographe* *Recherches sur les représentations juives et chrétiennes de l’espace* (ed. A. Desreumaux and F. Schmidt; Paris: Vrin, 1988), 155–201. See also ch. 9 “Of Monsters, Indians and Jews” in A. Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalypse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras*

This element occurs in the explanation that the angel gives to Ezra in the vision of the man arising from the sea in 4 Ezra 13. However, my interest lies in none of the important theological aspects which form part of this explanation (such as identifying the man who emerges from the sea as the pre-existing Messiah whom the Most High calls “*filius meus*”) but in the reference to the ten tribes of Israel, which is what unleashed the polemic concerning the possible Jewish origin of the American Indians.

In his authoritative commentary on 4 Ezra, Michael Stone says:

It is perhaps a curious footnote that, at the time of the discovery of the New World, 4 Ezra entered the debate that raged between scholars, both Catholic and Protestants, as to the origins of native American peoples. It was the passage in 4 Ezra 13:39–46 relating the withdrawal of the ten tribes, that was at the center of the debate by prominent authors. One party claimed, on this basis, that the American Indians were of Jewish descent, having originated from the ten tribes, while others denied this vigorously. Positions held in this debate were related, as F. Schmidt has shown, to opposed attitudes to the authority of the Apocrypha in general and of 4 Ezra in particular.⁴

The text to which Stone refers and is the subject of this note, is as follows:⁵

39 Et quoniam vidisti eum colligentem ad se aliam multitudinem pacificam,⁶
40 haec sunt decem tribus,⁷ quae captivae factae sunt de terra sua in diebus Iosiae regis,⁸ quem captivum⁹ duxit Salmanassar rex Assyriorum, et

(4 Ezra) *from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Oxford-Warburg Studies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 204–23.

⁴ M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 47.

⁵ I am quoting from the critical edition by A. F. J. Klijn, *Der lateinische Text der Apokalypse des Esra* (TUGAL 13; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1983), 84–85, which has several differences with respect to the standard edition by R. Weber, in the *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 2:1964–65. Weber includes 4 Ezra in the Appendix and prefers other readings based in various manuscripts. In the notes I indicate the most important variants and the additions from the Codex Legionensis, which is quite expansive.

⁶ Codex Legionensis adds “*plebem*.”

⁷ One part of the manuscript omits the figure. “*Decem*” is the reading in the codices Sangermanensis and in the second hand of codex Ambianensis; the Spanish manuscripts Complutensis, Abulensis y Legionensis preserve the reading “*novem*,” which is from the Ethiopic tradition and the one preferred in Weber’s edition; two Ethiopic manuscripts read “*nine and a half*,” which is the reading preferred by Stone, 404; Codex Legionensis adds “*Israel*.”

⁸ Other manuscripts give the kings in question different names: Hosiah (Abulensis), Hosea (Ambianensis, second hand), Hezekiah (Legionensis, which adds “*iudeorum*”).

⁹ In spite of the use of the singular, it is clear that the text refers to the ten tribes.