

## **The *History of the Rechabites* and the Jeremiah Literature**

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### *Abstract*

The article examines the cultural milieu of the *History of the Rechabites*. Following a comparison with early Midrash (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai*) and pointing out similarities with Hegešippus and later Christian writings about the Rechabites, it is the conclusion of this article that *The History* as we have it is a Christian composition, from the fourth century CE. It originated in a monastic milieu, the work of an author who was familiar with Jeremiah literature. The apocryphon attributes to the Rechabites features which characterize the Ten Lost Tribes. It is the first instance where such a connection is made, one that will be more and more widely spread in later centuries.

The little-studied text *Journey of Zosimos*, which I have identified as an early Byzantine Palestinian Christian story,<sup>1</sup> may shed light on issues of

1. R. Nikolsky, 'The Provenance of "The Journey of Zosimos"' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 163-71. For earlier studies see E.G. Martin, 'The Account of the Blessed Ones: A Study of the Development of the Apocryphon on the Rechabites and Zosimos (The Abode of the Rechabites)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1979); J.H. Charlesworth, 'Greek, Persian, Roman, Syrian and Egyptian Influence in Early Jewish Theology: A Study of the History of the Rechabites', in A. Caquot *et al.* (eds.), *Hellenica et Judaica: Hommage a Valentin Nikiprowetzky* (Collection de la Revue des études juives, 3; Leuven: Peeters, 1986), pp. 219-43; *idem*, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 223-28; *idem*, *The History of the Rechabites. I. The Greek Recension* (SBL Texts and Translations,

transmission of narrative traditions across the Jewish–Christian divide. In relation to this, the present article examines the literary structure of an independent apocryphal composition, the *History of the Rechabites* (hereafter *History*), which is embedded within this work. In the course of this study I will trace how the themes of the *History* developed out of and reflect the literary milieu of late-antiquity. Based on a consideration of literary-thematic parallels in both Jewish and Christian works, I will then attempt to date this composition, to establish its provenance, and to demonstrate its place within the larger context of Jeremiah–Baruch literature.

In the *Journey of Zosimos* the monk Zosimos is taken to see how the ‘Blessed Ones’ live. He discovers that they dwell in an Eden-like land where they eat fruit from the trees and do not have to work for their sustenance. The Blessed Ones inform Zosimos that they are the Rechabites. They recount their way of life and the events that led to their arrival in the land.<sup>2</sup> The *History* is part of what the Blessed Ones tell Zosimos about themselves.

The *History* is a narrative about an Old Testament figure, in this instance a collective biblical figure known mainly from Jeremiah 35, where the Rechabites are depicted as a pious group, descendants of Jonadab son of Rechab. The Rechabites are said to adhere to unique customs enjoined on them by their father (Jer. 35.6-9): they drink no wine; they do not build houses or live in them; they plant no vineyards; and they sow no crops. With its basis on a biblical figure, the *History* resembles such pseudepigraphic writings as the apocrypha about Adam and Eve, Enoch, Abraham, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others.

The *History* recounts the following story. The prophet Jeremiah warns the people of Judea about the coming destruction, and calls on everyone

17; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); *idem*, ‘History of the Rechabites’, in *OTP*, II, pp. 443-61; C.H. Knights, ‘The Story of Zosimos or The History of the Rechabites?’, *JSJ* 24 (1993), pp. 235-45; *idem*, ‘Towards a Critical Introduction to “The History of the Rechabites”’, *JSJ* 26 (1995), pp. 324-42; *idem*, ‘The History of the Rechabites—An Initial Commentary’, *JSJ* 28 (1997), pp. 413-36; *idem*, ‘The Abode of the Blessed: A Source of the Story of Zosimus’, *JSP* 17 (1998), pp. 79-93. I thank Professor Knights for putting all of his articles at my disposal. For a complete bibliography see C.H. Knights, ‘A Century of Research into the Story/Apocalypse of Zosimus and/or the History of the Rechabites’, *JSP* 15 (1997), pp. 53-66; L. DiTommaso, *A Bibliography of Pseudepigrapha Research 1850–1999* (JSPSup, 39; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 983-97.

2. For Knights’ translation of the Greek version of the *History*, see the Appendix (below).

to repent and to abandon their evil ways. Upon hearing this Jonadab commanded his sons and daughters to take off their clothes and to refrain from drinking wine and eating bread until the Lord heard their appeal. They did as they were commanded and the Lord's anger abated and did not destroy Jerusalem. Subsequently, a new king came to power. He summoned the sons of Rechab and inquired about their origins and customs. They told him that they were from his people and that the Lord had honored their prayer and had had mercy on the city. The king complimented them on their behavior but informed them that the time had come to desist from their peculiar customs and to mingle with the people. The Rechabites refused, saying that they would not disobey God's command. The king became angry and threw them in jail. In the middle of the night a brilliant light shone and an angel appeared and released them from jail. He led them along a river to the place where they were to dwell. The river disappeared and water from the abyss surrounded them and a wall of clouds covered the water, totally enclosing them in the land God provided for them.

Although this comprehensive and fluent story about the Rechabites contains very few additions and conveys an overall impression of a unified narrative unit, separate *topoi* from Late Antique literature can be identified that provide clues about the author's cultural background.<sup>3</sup> Most pertinent to this examination are Jewish midrashic texts and the works of fourth-century Christian authors, especially those with links to monasticism. It is through analysis of this literary milieu that I seek to discover this work's provenance and date.

The narrative may be divided into four sections, according to which the following discussion shall proceed:

1. Background events: the call of the prophet, the Rechabites' answer to his call, their prayer and God's return from his anger (8.1-6).
2. The dialogue with the new king and its consequences: the Rechabites are imprisoned (9.1-10.4).
3. The Rechabites' escape from prison (10.5).
4. Their journey to the wondrous land (10.6-9).

3. For an analysis of the meaning of the text, including the epilogue, cf. R. Nikolsky, 'The Adam and Eve Traditions in *The Journey of Zosimos*', in E.G. Chazon, D. Satran and R.A. Clements (eds.), *Things Revealed: Studies in Honor of Michael E. Stone* (JSJSup, 89; Leiden: E.J. Brill).

1. *Parallels to the Rechabites' Apocryphon from Late Antiquity*a. *Section One: The Rechabites' Customs*

(1) *Mourning or Asceticism?* The Rechabites in our story can be identified with those of the biblical story: their name and their father's name are the same,<sup>4</sup> neither group drinks wine, and both stories employ the first person plural—a strong literary device. The narratives do differ in some of their features, however.

In the *History* the Rechabites begin to practice their unique customs following the prophet's call for the people to repent of their evil ways. In the biblical story the Rechabites' customs are part of their way of life handed down from past generations and have nothing to do with the prophet's call. Second, the customs differ in detail: the biblical Rechabites do not drink wine, do not build houses, do not sow or plant vines and they live in tents. The Rechabites of the *History* drink no wine, honey or liquor, and they remove their clothing. Missing from the apocryphon are the elements of planting, sowing seeds, or living in tents. Finally, the biblical story does not mention the prayers of the Rechabites, found in the apocryphon, which led to God repenting of his anger against Jerusalem and avoidance of the destruction prophesied by Jeremiah.<sup>5</sup>

The Rechabites also make their appearance in the Midrash, which documents one of the differences between the biblical Rechabites and those of the apocryphon, namely, the connection between the initiation of their unique customs and the prophet's call. As we shall see, other features attributed to the Rechabites in the Midrash are missing from the apocryphon.<sup>6</sup>

In most cases in the Midrash the Rechabites are portrayed as the descendants of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. The basis for this identification is

4. The chances of there being two people named 'Jonadab son of Rechab' are slim. I thank Tal Ilan for this observation, which was delivered to me in a personal communication.

5. Knights, 'Story of Zosimos', pp. 243-44, raises the same issue.

6. The early Midrashim that relate to the Rechabites are: *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai* (J.N. Epstein and E.Z. Melamed edn), p. 134; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael* (Ch.Sh. Horovitz and I.A. Rabin edn), p. 199; *Sifre BaMidbar* (Ch.Sh. Horovitz edn), pp. 72-73; *Sifre Dvarim* 52; *Midrash Zuta* 10.29. For a fuller discussion of these midrashim, see Nikolsky, 'Provenance', pp. 25-39. For other studies of this passage, see M. Hirshman, 'The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes: Formats of Exegesis in Lat Antiquity', *HUCA* 59 (1988), pp. 137-65 (Hebrew); Z. Safrai, 'The Sons of Rechab, the Essenes and the Idea of Going into the Desert among the Rabbis', *Bar Ilan* 16-17 (1979), pp. 37-58 (Hebrew).

1 Chron. 2.55: ‘The families of the scribes that dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites; these are the Kenites who came from Hammath, father of the house of Rechab’. Since, according to this verse, the Kenites and the Rechabites came from the same place (Hammath), they are considered to be one and the same group; and since the Kenites are identified as the descendants of Jethro, so are the Rechabites. Consequently, characteristics attributed to the descendants of Jethro are sometimes applied to the Rechabites. The Jethroites serve as the prototype for converts in many Midrashic discussions, and so Rechabites also appear in some Midrashic texts as an example of pious converts.

The most important and striking parallels between the *History* and the Midrash are found in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai*, which is dated roughly to the mid-third century CE. This work contains a lengthy discussion of Exod. 18.27: ‘Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land’. The Midrash inquires why Moses sent Jethro away: Was he not dishonoring him by so doing? According to R. Joshua, Jethro was in fact dismissed with great honor. According to R. Eleazar ha-Modai, Jethro left in order to convert the people of his country, intending to join the Israelites at a later date. The Midrash inquires whether Jethro ever returned to rejoin the Israelites, providing a positive answer, saying that evidence for his return comes from reference made to the descendants of Jethro in the book of Judges (Judg. 1.16), where they are depicted as living among the Israelites. The *Mekhilta* goes on to characterize the descendants of Jethro as lovers of the Torah. It is in this context that we find the following two passages that refer specifically to the Rechabites:<sup>7</sup>

*Paragraph A*

Just as [Jethro] loved the Torah, so too his children after him loved the Torah as God said to Jeremiah: ‘Go to the house of the Rechabites’ and ‘give them wine to drink’ (Jer. 35.2), and ‘I set bowls full of wine and cups before [the sons of] the house of the Rechabites, and said to them, “Have some wine”’. (Jer. 35.5)<sup>8</sup>

7. The parallel paragraphs in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael* lack the passages pertinent to the discussion of the apocryphon. According to Margalioth, none of these paragraphs are part of the much later *Midrash Agur*, which were mistakenly incorporated into the Epstein-Melamed edition of this *Mekhilta*; see M. Margalioth, Review of Epstein-Melamed’s edition of the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochay, Kiryat Sefer* 31 (1956), pp. 155-59 (Hebrew).

8. The word ‘sons’ is missing in the citation of the verse in the Midrash.

*Paragraph B*

Jeremiah said to them: 'God told me that you should drink wine'. They said to him: 'Our father commanded us not to drink wine as long as this house is destroyed'. But it was not yet destroyed!?' [This should be understood] thus: 'He told us: mourn for this [house], because it will be destroyed in the end'.

In Paragraph A the Jethroites are presented as a model for lovers of the Torah based upon an apparent reference to their obedience. This notion is supported by a citation of the chapter from Jeremiah, in which the Rechabites are praised for their obedience: 'The commands of Jonadab son of Rechab have been fulfilled: he charged his children not to drink wine, and to this day they have not drunk, in obedience to the charge of their ancestor' (Jer. 35.14). As the Rechabites are used to illustrate the Jethroites' love of the Torah, this midrashic passage is understandable only if the Rechabites are identified as descendants of Jethro.

In Paragraph B, as in the biblical story (Jer. 35.6), the text recounts a dialogue between the Rechabites and Jeremiah, but the dialogue here takes a different turn. Whereas in the biblical scene the Rechabites simply explain their refusal to comply with Jeremiah's order by referring to Jonadab's command, in the *Mekhilta* the Rechabites provide an explanation for Jonadab's command, linking it to the (future) destruction of the temple: 'do not drink wine as long as this house is destroyed'. The *Mekhilta* goes on to question this explanation: If the Temple had not yet been destroyed, why should the Rechabites mourn it? It solves this dissonance by looking to future events: If the Temple is going to be destroyed in the future, they should go ahead and mourn it now. Considering that Jonadab lived at the time of Jehu (841–814 BCE), a few hundred years before the destruction of the First Temple (586 BCE), this explanation seems rather strange. The Midrash makes no attempt to resolve this conflict, nor will I try to do so here.

Paragraph B places the Rechabites' custom of abstention from wine in the context of mourning customs.<sup>9</sup> In the apocryphon this same custom appears in the context of asceticism: the Rechabites abstain from drinking liquor [σίκερα] as well as wine, which calls up an association with the

9. A parallel passage from *Sifre Ba-Midbar*, J. Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation* (2 vols.; Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1986), II, pp. 55-56 (para. 78), does not present the Rechabites as mourners, but rather utilizes the injunctions of Jonadab as found in the biblical narrative. I hope to discuss the relationship between the two midrashim at some future opportunity.

Nazirite's vow ('he shall abstain from wine and any other intoxicant', Num. 6.3).<sup>10</sup>

The appearance of the same practice both as a mourning custom and as an ascetic custom is attributable to the fact that many customs which are part of the mourning canon of Jewish culture serve other functions as well.<sup>11</sup> The abstinence from wine, for example, is cited as a mourning custom (*m. Ta'an.* 4.7), but is also part of the law of the Nazirite (Num. 6.3), it is part of priestly praxis ('Drink no wine or other intoxicant you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting', Lev. 10.9; cf. also Ezek. 44.21), and it is also part of the preparation to a visionary experience, as found in Daniel ('At that time, I, Daniel... had eaten no rich bread, no meat or wine had entered my mouth', Dan. 10.2-3).<sup>12</sup>

The issue of the destruction of the temple is shared by the *Mekhilta* and the apocryphon. In the Midrash this issue seems to be a sidetrack from the main thread of the discussion, which is about the Jethroites and their piousness as converts, and it appears that the rabbis inserted an external tradition which was known to them. Despite the points of contact noted here, the secondary nature of the material in the Midrash and the understanding of the Rechabites' practices as mourning customs (and not as

10. Some scholars see the words 'do not drink liquor and honey' as an addition to an older and more original text. There is no reason to assume that this sentence is not part of the original text of the apocryphon; notwithstanding its stylistic 'heaviness' it does not constitute a repetition about abstaining from wine, but adds the unique nazirite twist to the story which characterizes the apocryphon. See also the quote from Jerome below.

11. For additional studies of this topic see, for example, M.E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), esp. pp. 118-19, 409; M.A. Wes, 'Mourning Becomes Jerusalem: Josephus, Jesus the Son of Ananias, and the Book of Baruch (1 Baruch)', in J.N. Bremmer and F. García-Martínez (eds.), *Sacred History and Sacred Texts in Early Judaism* (Kampen: Kok, 1992); S.D. Fraade, 'Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism', in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), I, pp. 253-88; I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), esp. pp. 99-101, for use in apocalyptic texts; E.E. Urbach, 'Ascetism and Suffering in Rabbinic Thought', in *idem*, *The Sages, their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), pp. 437-58 (Hebrew), for the rabbinic understanding of mourning; A. Troper, 'The Meaning of Fasting and the Reasons for it During the Second Temple Periods' (unpublished Masters dissertation, Hebrew University, 1999 [Hebrew]), for biblical material; N. Hakham, 'The Public Fasts in the Second Temple Period' (unpublished Masters dissertation, Hebrew University, 1996), for Second Temple Period material.

12. On these customs in this context see Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, pp. 118-19.

ascetic customs as they appear in the apocryphon), lead to the conclusion that this midrash, as we know it, cannot be a source of the apocryphon. Further support for this conclusion comes from the fact that the apocryphon does not refer to issues which constitute the mainstream for the Midrashic discussion, that is, the Rechabites' identification with the Jethroites, their status as converts, and so on. It is more likely that both texts utilized a third source, either an oral or written tradition, which connects the Rechabites' customs to the destruction of the Temple. Later on in the *Mekhilta* other issues concerning the Rechabites are raised, all of which deal with their status as converts and exhibit no relationship to the apocryphon.

I take issue with previous claims by scholars that the *Mekhilta* was a source for the *History*. Their arguments were largely grounded in their similar depictions of the Rechabites' concern for the fate of Jerusalem, in the overall 'Jewish atmosphere' of the text, and in the absence of Christian elements such as references to Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Careful review of the Midrashic passages reveals not so much a dependence on the Midrash as a source as it uncovers common themes in literary from Late Antiquity that do not necessarily prove the 'Jewishness' of the apocryphon. Indeed, I will argue here that the Christian handling of the Rechabites provides a more harmonious literary milieu for the *History*.

(2) *The Rechabites' Practice of Prayer*. The Rechabites' prayer practice described in the apocryphon, a description of which is absent from the early strata of the Midrash, is attested in another early source,<sup>14</sup> a quote of Hegesippus preserved in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The context is the stoning of James the Just. In this passage Hegesippus describes James as one who

was holy from birth, he drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head; he did not smear himself with oil, and took no baths. He alone was permitted to enter the Holy Place, for

13. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, p. 225; Knights, 'Story of Zosimos'; *idem*, 'Critical Introduction'; and *idem*, 'Commentary'.

14. This was studied by O. Ir-Shai, 'The Church of Jerusalem—From "The Church of the Circumcision" to "The Church from the Gentiles"', in Y. Tsafirir *et al.* (eds.), *The Jerusalem Book—The Roman-Byzantine Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1996), pp. 61-115 (70) (Hebrew); see also *idem*, 'Historical Aspects of the Christian-Jewish Polemic Concerning the Church of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University Jerusalem, 1993) (Hebrew); I rely heavily on his analysis of this material.



his garments were not of wool but of linen. He used to enter the Sanctuary alone, and was often found on his knees beseeching forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's.<sup>15</sup>

The behaviour attributed to James in this passage is strikingly similar to the practices assigned to the Rechabites in the apocryphon and in the Midrash: abstinence from wine or liquor (as in the apocryphon) and prayer (as in the apocryphon).<sup>16</sup> But there is a further link with the Rechabites in the description of James' stoning:

So they (the Jews) went up and threw down the Righteous One. Then they said to each other 'Let us stone James the Righteous, and began to stone him, as in spite of his fall he was still alive. But he turned and knelt, uttering the words: 'I beseech Thee, Lord God and Father, forgive them...'. One of the descendants of Rechab the son of Rachabim, the priestly family to which Jeremiah the Prophet bore witness, called out: 'Stop! What are you doing? The Righteous One is praying for you.' Then one of them, a fuller, took the club which he used to beat out the clothes, and brought it down on the head of the Righteous One.<sup>17</sup>

Aside from its description of the horrible death of James the Just, this passage associates James with the Rechabites in yet another way, in the person of a Rechabite who stopped the torture and, apparently being well acquainted with James' customs, explained the nature of his pious action: James was praying for his executors.

Unfortunately this passage from Hegesippus lacks parallels and context. But it does establish the existence of a connection between the Rechabites and the customs described in the apocryphon in at least the second century.

The next two sections of the apocryphon exhibit general similarities to themes in literature of late antiquity. As ample scholarly attention on the text has focused on these sections, the treatment here is brief. The concluding section of the narrative is of special interest as it bestows a unique slant on the Rechabites' story.

#### b. *Section Two: The Dialogue with the King*

No narrative parallels as strikingly close as the ones demonstrated for Section One and early Midrash exist for the second part of the story,

15. Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (trans. G.A. Williamson; Baltimore: Dorset, 1965), p. 100.

16. A Rechabites' abstinence from anointment appears in the Midrash and in Hegesippus; as it does not appear in the apocryphon I do not discuss it here.

17. Eusebius, *History*, pp. 101-102.

the dialogue with the king. Knights correctly points out this narrative sequence's similarity to the pericope in Exod. 1.8, 'a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph', when one king favored the protagonist and the following one did not.<sup>18</sup>

The assuaging language used by the king in his dialogue with the Rechabites, *καλῶς ποιήσατε*, is reminiscent of the serpent's words to Eve before making his disastrous suggestion: *καλῶς ποιείτε*. Another example of a king who used 'softening words' in an attempt to convince a group of people to obey his rules against their will comes from *4 Macc.* 8.5, where the king tries to tempt the seven brothers to bow to his statue: 'Young men, with favorable feeling I admire each and every one of you, and greatly respect the beauty and the number of such brothers... [I]... exhort you to yield to me and enjoy my friendship.' L. Wills, who studied the *topos* of the sage-king dialogue in late-antique literature, demonstrates the early beginning of this genre and its biblical appearance in the books of Esther and Daniel.<sup>19</sup>

We see here, then, the employment of a very well known and ancient narrative scene, one which is found in Jewish literature, although it is not especially rabbinic. Nor is this narrative scene exclusively Jewish in nature.

### c. Section Three: *The Miraculous Escape*

The next passage in the story describes the Rechabites' escape from prison: 'And light shone in the cell, and an angel un-roofed the prison and caught us by our heads, and led us out of the prison and put us in the air'. Knights points out the similarity between this manner of transport and that found in *Bel and the Dragon*, when the prophet Habakkuk was carried off to Babylon (Dan. 14.36): *καὶ ἐπελάβετο ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου τῆς κορυφῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ βαστάσας τῆς κόμμης τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ* ('then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown of his head and carried him by his hair'). In the *History* we find *καὶ ἐκράτησεν τῆς κορυφεῆς ἡμῶν* ('he caught our heads').<sup>20</sup>

18. Knights, 'Critical Introduction', p. 329.

19. L.M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* (Harvard Dissertations in Religion, 26; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 74. He claims, however, that by the Roman period 'the high period of the genre was clearly over'. See also M.D. Herr, 'The Historical Significance of the Dialogues between Jewish Sages and Roman Dignitaries', *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), pp. 123-50 (125-26).

20. Knights, 'Commentary', p. 432.

B. McNeil notes the similarity between this miraculous escape from jail and the one found in Acts.<sup>21</sup> After Peter's imprisonment by Herod, the text relates:

...Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him saying 'Get up quickly'. And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, 'Fasten your belt and put on your sandals'. He did so. Then he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me'. (Acts 12.6-8)

The phrase 'and a light shone in the cell' appears both in the Rechabites' story and in Acts, which is its usual context in Late Antique literature. Knights observes that the use of the Greek word οἰκήμα to denote a prison cell is unique to the story in Acts and to the Rechabites' apocryphon,<sup>22</sup> making it quite certain that the apocryphon was influenced by the New Testament text.<sup>23</sup> The story exhibits a familiarity with a Late Antique *topos* of a miraculous escape from prison, most likely known to the author of the *History* from its Christian version in Acts.

The same narrative scene also appears in a fragment of Artapanus, where Moses is miraculously released from the jail in which he has been imprisoned by the Egyptian pharaoh.<sup>24</sup> Although the sequence found in the Artapanus story—a dialogue with a king, followed by the hero's imprisonment and his subsequent miraculous escape—is shared by the apocryphon, we cannot, however, assume any direct influence, this because only a summary of Artapanus' work has survived, which is cited in Eusebius' *Paraeparatio Evangelica*, and not his actual writings.

21. B. McNeil, 'The Narration of Zosimus', *JSJ* 9 (1978), pp. 68-82.

22. Knights, 'Commentary', p. 432.

23. McNeil, 'Narration of Zosimus', p. 71, agrees with this statement, but claims that a Christian author unconsciously inserted this sentence.

24. See J.J. Collins' translation, in *OTP*, II, p. 901. Some scholars claim that the structure of the story in Acts is influenced by Artapanus. A later reference to the story from Acts in the *Epistula apostolorum* assumes that Peter returned to jail after celebrating Passover; this assumption could be influenced by the fragments of Artapanus found in Eusebius. Other scholars who comment on the story from Acts identify in it the *topos* of deliverance founded on the Exodus story, see the commentary by Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 94; J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB, 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 489, and the parallels from Classical literature.

d. *Section Four: Arrival in the Land*

We now turn to the final passage of the *History of Rechabites*, which leads us to newer ground. The sentences upon which I base the discussion appear in ch. 10 of the apocryphon:

...and [the angel] placed us in (the) air, and carried us to the water of the river; then he said to us, 'Wherever the water proceeds, you proceed, also'. And we walked with the water and with the angel. Then, when it carried us to this place, the river became dry, and the water was lost, and the place was split, and water came up out of the abyss. And surrounded this country, and a wall of cloud came and overshadowed the water. And [God] did not scatter us all over the earth, but gave us this country.<sup>25</sup>

This passage, which relates a pious group's escape from disaster to a legendary place where they are saved and live a miraculous life, is a known narrative tradition in late antiquity. It is found in some pseudepigraphic texts of an apocalyptic nature, including *The Sibylline Oracles*,<sup>26</sup> where a group of righteous people are led by an angel, and saved from the events of the end of days; the *Ascension of Isaiah*,<sup>27</sup> where a group of prophets escapes from Jerusalem which was under the control of a Satanic ruler, and goes off to live an ascetic life in the mountains, eating nothing but wild herbs; and the *Apocalypse of Elijah*,<sup>28</sup> where the righteous are removed from the world at the time of the coming of the antichrist, a scene probably influenced by Rev. 7.9-17. In the apocryphon, the Rechabites are described in a similar manner: as a group of pious people who are whisked away from their normal domicile to an unnamed land.

Of the works sharing this motif the scene found in the postdestruction first-century apocalyptic book *4 Ezra* is unique. Not only is it part of the end-of-days events, it is also an expansion of the biblical story of the exile of the northern tribes of Israel. Ezra sees a messianic figure arrive at a far away place and take a 'peaceable multitude' from there in a vision, which is interpreted for him by an angel.<sup>29</sup> The angel explains that the multitude is

25. There is some disagreement between the manuscripts as to what the angel actually does in this scene: Did he bring the Rechabites to the river straight away, or did he put them in the air first? I am inclined to think, as other scholars do (e.g. Knights, 'Commentary', p. 433) that the word 'air' belongs to the original text. Hence, the angel rescues the Rechabites from jail by taking them up into the air, and later followed a river to their final place of rescue.

26. Knights, 'Critical Introduction', p. 340.

27. *Asc. Isa.* 2.7-11. See M. Knibb's translation in *OTP*, II, pp. 156-57.

28. Wintermute's translation in *OTP*, II, pp. 735-54.

29. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p. 314.

the nine and one half tribes which were led away from their own land into captivity in the days of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser the king of the Assyrians led captive... They formed this plan for themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the nations and go to a more distant region, where no human race had ever lived, that there at least they might keep their statutes which they had not kept in their own land. (*4 Ezra* 13.40-42)

It is here, in *4 Ezra*, that we first find a description of the Ten Tribes as engaging in a pious way of life beyond the inhabited regions. Henceforth, this became a characteristic feature of the Ten Tribes.

This notion of the piety of the Ten Tribes does not appear in earlier Midrashic texts; what does appear are several short narratives about the tribes. Some of these narratives exhibit shared themes with the apocryphon about the Rechabites' arrival in their land: these include the river and the cloud that surrounds them and the fact that they are not scattered throughout the lands.

(1) *The River and the Cloud that Surround the Ten Tribes and Rechabites.*

In the apocryphon, a river, different from the one with which the Rechabites traveled, comes out of the abyss and surrounds them. In the Palestinian Talmud the Ten Tribes are described as living on the banks of a wondrous river—the Sambation. The passage in the Palestinian Talmud (*y. Sanh.* 10.3, 29c [late fourth century?]) reads as follows:

R. Berachia and R. Chelbo in the name of R. Shmuel bar Nachmo: To three places Israel were exiled: One is before the Sanbation River, another is Dafne of Antioch, and still another: a cloud came down on them and covered them.

The river which appears in the Rechabites' story is not named Sambation. Although impassable like the Sambation, it lacks its most characteristic feature, namely, that it flows on some days and rests on others. On the other hand, the Sambation is not described as coming out of the abyss in the Midrash.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, a river as a defining border of the settlement appears in both narratives: regarding the Ten Tribes in the Midrash and with respect to the Rechabites in the apocryphon.

30. A description of the Sambation as having both features—flowing on certain days and resting on others, and coming out of the abyss—is found in a later Jewish text: *Midrash Eser Galuyot*. This midrash describes the sons of the Levites, of which it is known that they were exiled to a place similar to that of the Ten Tribes. The story about the Levites appears in many versions of this Midrash. In my opinion this Midrash was influenced by the *History*, but this needs further study. See M. Ish-Shalom, 'Midrash Eser Galuyot', *Sinai* 43 (1958), pp. 195-211 (195) (Hebrew).

(2) *The Ten Tribes and Rechabites not Scattered*. The final sentence of the *History* emphasizes the fact that the Rechabites were not scattered throughout the land. A contrasting statement regarding the tribes of Judah and Benjamin appears in *Bereshit Rabbah* (fifth to sixth centuries):

R. Judah son of R. Simon said: The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were not exiled to the same place as the other ten tribes were exiled: The Ten Tribes were exiled beyond the River the Sabbathon, whereas the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are dispersed in all the countries.<sup>31</sup>

This Midrash emphasizes the fact that, after being exiled, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are scattered in all the lands. A logical conjecture would, therefore, be that the other tribes, the Ten Lost Tribes, were not scattered. This is the exact statement found in the apocryphon about the Rechabites.

All these midrashic parallels are scant and relatively late. Earlier traditions must be sought elsewhere. In his article about the *Vita* of St André Zoërd, the patron saint of Slovenia, J.T. Milik relates to the *Story of Zosimos*, in which the *History* is embedded, as follows:<sup>32</sup> ‘One finds, then, in this apocalypse of Zosimos...some ancient legends about the Ten Tribes (and a half) which are lost’.<sup>33</sup> Milik was probably influenced by M.R. James, who noted the following in the introduction to his edition of the Greek text of the *Journey of Zosimos*:

The recurrence of the description of the Lost Tribes in three documents so widely separated in origin and date as are the *Story of Zosimos*, the Conflict of Matthew and the poems of Commodian seems to me to point to the fact that in some earlier lost book...a Jewish Apocalypse, there occurred a description...of the manner of life of this mysterious people.<sup>34</sup>

It is James’ opinion that the material found in Commodian’s *Instructions* and *Carmena Apologeticum* and in the Ethiopic *Acts of St Matthew* represents the reworking of an older text about the Ten Tribes that was also

31. *Midrash Rabbah (Genesis)* (trans. H. Freedman; London: Soncino, 1951), II, p. 669.

32. J.T. Milik, ‘Aba Zosimas et le theme des Tribus Perdues’, *Bulletin d’ Etudes Karaites* I (1983), pp. 7-18 (11-12).

33. ‘On trouve ainsi, dans cette apocalypse de Zosima...d’anceinnes legendes sur les Dix Tribus (et demie) perdues’.

34. M.R. James, *Apocrypha Anecdota* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), II, No. 3, p. 93; and see also *idem*, *Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Their Titles and Fragments* (London: SPCK, 1920), pp. 103-105.

reworked in the *Journey of Zosimos*.<sup>35</sup> The conjectured existence of such a text seems logical. It is not clear, however, to which section of the *Journey of Zosimos* James refers when he speaks of similarities between it and the above-mentioned texts.<sup>36</sup> If he is referring to the section with which we are dealing, the *History*, his statement seems exaggerated: the *History* is not a reworking of a text about the Ten Tribes; it seems more accurate to say that, in creating a new story about the Rechabites, the *History* utilizes a tradition about the Ten Tribes. Describing the Rechabites in a manner similar to that of the Ten Tribes represents an innovation on the part of the *History*'s author.

As in the description of the Rechabites' customs, the similarities between the Ten Tribe narratives in the *History* and the Midrash provide no reason to assume dependency of the apocryphon on the Midrash or vice versa. The Christian literature (Commodian) could have been a more readily accessible source for the author of the apocryphon.

Thus far I have searched the literature for thematic and narrative parallels to the *History*, analyzing its similarities to midrashic texts, and its thematic parallels with familiar narratives found in Artapanus, *4 Maccabees* and the Ten Tribes traditions. Themes in the Midrash that had bearing on the first section of the apocryphon, which treats the customs of the Rechabites, were found to be of secondary nature there whereas the central issues that concerned the Midrash do not appear to have influenced the apocryphon at all. From this I concluded that the Midrash and the apocryphon are not mutually dependent but rather rely on another text or texts, oral traditions, or general knowledge about the Rechabites. The similarities to narratives about the Ten Tribes are not of such a nature as to enable us to call the *History* a story about the Ten Tribes, as has been argued by other scholars (e.g. M.R. James and J.T. Milik); it is more accurate to state that the author of the *History* is utilizing Ten Tribes traditions to create his new story about the Rechabites.

35. For details regarding these texts and a summary of their content, see James, *Apocrypha*, pp. 88-92, also *Lost Apocrypha*, pp. 103-105.

36. He may be referring to the section which tells about the wonderful life of the Blessed Ones: ch.12. This section is not discussed in the present article; it was adopted from Palladius's text about the Brahmans—see A.N. Veselofskii, 'K voprosu ob istochnikax serbskoj Aleksandrii', *Journal Minsterstva narodnava prosveshveniya* 233 (1884), pp. 149-97; J.D.M. Derrett, 'Jewish Brahmans and the Tale of Zosimus: A Theme Common to Three Religions', *Classica and Mediaevalia* 34 (1983), pp. 75-90; Nikolsky, 'Provenance', pp. 67-85.

As for religious affiliation, there is nothing uniquely Jewish about the *History*. In fact, the quote from Acts and the lack of dependence on midrashic texts about the Rechabites or about the Ten Tribes lead me to assume a Christian rather than a Jewish provenance for this text. This issue is discussed later in the present article. First let us turn our attention to a different question: it seems that there is a logical flaw in the otherwise fluent and coherent story of the *History*, whose narrative ‘makes sense’ and whose sections show a logical sequence—obedience to the customs inspired by the call of the prophet Jeremiah, the effectiveness of their prayers, the new king who did not accept their separatist inclinations, their incarceration, miraculous escape and their arrival in their new land. Upon reading the apocryphon about the Rechabites one cannot help but wonder about the claim that the Rechabites saved the city of Jerusalem when it is well known that Jerusalem was, in fact, destroyed?

## 2. *The Title from the Psalms*

In the apocryphon, the Rechabites can claim success in canceling the destruction of the city via their prayers because they were taken away to a different land before the destruction took place. We find a parallel to this tradition in the title of Psalm 70 (71 in the Masoretic text), which appears only in the Greek version of the psalm:

τῷ Δαυιδ υἱῶν Ιωναδαβ καὶ τῶν πρώτων ἀρχμαλωτισθέντων

Pertaining to David, when the sons of Jonadab and the commanders were taken captive.

The superscript appears to refer to the first occupation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the days of Jehoiachin (597 BCE). During this occupation Nebuchadnezzar conquered the city but did not destroy it, although he took the vessels of the Temple and exiled some of its inhabitants (‘He exiled all of Jerusalem: all the commanders and all the warriors—ten thousand exiles—as well as all the craftsmen and smiths; only the poorest people in the land were left’, 2 Kgs. 24.14); according to the superscript the Rechabites were also in Jerusalem at this period. In biblical historiography, after Jehoiachin’s exile, Zedekiah was made king, and during his reign the city was again conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, was destroyed by his general Nebuzaradan, and the rest of its population was exiled (2 Kgs. 24.17–25.11). According to the apocryphon, the Rechabites were not around to see the destruction.



The origin of the superscript is unclear. In an article devoted to the superscripts of the psalms,<sup>37</sup> Albert Pietersma characterizes them as exegetical rather than as liturgical in nature. Some titles originated in the Hebrew parent text, but others are a product of exegetical processes within the Greek transmission of the text.<sup>38</sup> Pietersma finds the appearance of the Rechabites in this superscript problematic.

In this superscript we meet the notion that the Rechabites left the city of Jerusalem at an early stage; in this respect the superscript resembles what is related in the apocryphon. But analysis of the superscript's exact meaning elicits disharmony with the apocryphon: if the Rechabites indeed left the city with the first captives, they were then not on the scene when the new king (Zedekiah) rose to power, and the dialogue with him, their imprisonment and their miraculous release could not have taken place. There are three narrative units here: (1) the biblical story of the first captivity; (2) the superscript of the psalm; (3) and the apocryphon of the Rechabites. Pairing any two of the narratives makes the third illogical.

If we are to evince evidence of influence, or of a link between the superscript and the apocryphon, I suggest that the superscript may be understood differently. The Greek word *πρώτους* used in the superscript and in the biblical text to denote 'commanders' (שרים in the Hebrew), also means 'the first ones'. Interpreted in this manner, the superscript would then read 'Pertaining to David, and about the sons of Jonadab, who are the first to be taken captive',<sup>39</sup> without any reference to the biblical story about the early conquest of Jerusalem and the exile of its leaders.

This understanding provides a suitable background for the apocryphon and leads to the following reconstruction of the sequence of events: the prophet Jeremiah's call for repentance (in the time of Jehoiakim [Jer. 35.1]?) was answered by the Rechabites who prayed for the city; the city was saved. A new king rose to power (Jehoiachin?) and jailed the Rechabites. Subsequently they were freed from jail, and were the first to be exiled from the land: they were led away miraculously from the country before

37. A. Pietersma, 'Exegesis and Liturgy in the Superscriptions of the Greek Psalter', in B.A. Taylor (ed.), *Tenth Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Oslo 1998* (SBLSCS, 51; Atlanta: SBL, 2001), pp. 99-138. (I was not able to see the article in its printed form, so my reference is to a sequential numbering of the article. I thank Professor Pietersma for letting me read his article prior to its publication.)

38. Pietersma, 'Exegesis', p. 113.

39. Pietersma mentions this understanding of the title as well; see his 'Exegesis', p. 112.

the destruction of Jerusalem. Since this superscript appears in the biblical text in connection to a psalm, and not to the biblical story of the destruction of Jerusalem, I think it reasonable to assume that the author of the apocryphon understood it as a reference to an early exile of the Rechabites, without trying to harmonize it with the details of the biblical historiography from Kings.

None of the Jewish texts dealing with the Rechabites refers to this superscript. This contrasts with the Christian references to the Rechabites, to be discussed presently. There we find widespread reference to the superscript; indeed, it is often the verse around which a discussion of the Rechabites is centered. This further distances the *History* from being identified as a Jewish text and supports my conclusion that it is a Christian work.

### 3. *The Christian Material about the Rechabites*

From the third to the seventh century eleven Christian authors mention the Rechabites: Eusebius (260–340), Athanasius (296–373), Pseudo-Athanasius (fourth century), Gregorius Nazianzus (330–390), Gregorius of Nice (330–395), Jerome (345–420), John Chrysostomos (347–407), John Cassian (360–430), Nilus of Ancyra (d. 430), Theodoret of Kyrrh (393–460) and the *Chronicon Pascale* (seventh century).<sup>40</sup> Of these eleven authors, eight belong to the fourth–fifth centuries, when there was an apparent awakening of Christian interest in the Rechabites. Most of the references to the Rechabites are brief; some only praise their obedience. A typical example of such a treatment is found in Chrysostom’s homily about the apostles:

And the prophet Jeremiah brought forward into public view the children of Rechab, how they would not consent to violate the command of their father...<sup>41</sup>

In some instances the Christian authors refer to the Rechabites as proto-ascetics; this is the case for Athanasius, Jerome, Gregorius Nazianzus,

40. Eusebius, *De Vita Prophetorum*; Athanasius, *Explanatio in Jeremiam* PG 81, cc. 680–681, *sermo de Patientia* PG 26, c. 1300; Pseudo-Athanasius, *Exposition in Psalmum LXX* PG 27, c. 316; Gregorius Nazianzus, *De vita sua*, p. 295; Gregorius of Nice, *Inscriptiones Psalmorum*, p. 147; Jerome, *Letters* 58,5; John Chrysostomos, *Fragmenta in Jeremiam* PG 64 c. 745; In *Acta Apostolorum. Homil. XIV* PG 60, c. 118; John Cassian, *Conferences* 21.4; Nilus of Ancyra, *De Monastica Exercitatione* 3; Theodoretus: In *Librum I Paralipomenon* PG 80, c. 801.

41. NPNF 11, p. 93 (Homily 14).

and some others. To illustrate this attitude I quote Gregorius Nazianzus' description of the difficulties he encountered once he left monastic living (during the period in which he served as episcopos). Gregorius describes the monastic life by recalling Old Testament figures who had been monastic models: 'Elijah comes to mind, the Tishbites, and the big Carmel or the miraculous feeding (1 Kings 17.3–7)...and the simple life of the sons of Jonadab'.<sup>42</sup>

Jerome also sees in the Rechabites a monastic model, as he states in his letter to Paulinus of Nola:

Let us, monks...go back to the authority of scripture, we have our masters in Elijah and Elisha, and our leaders in the sons of the prophets, who lived in fields and solitary places and made themselves tents by the waters of Jordan. The sons of Rechab too are of the number who drank neither wine nor strong drink and who abode in tents... This is probably what is meant by the title of the seventy-first psalm: 'of the sons of Jonadab and of those who were first led into captivity'. The person intended is Jonadab the son of Rechab who is described in the book of Kings as having gone into the chariot of Jehu. His sons having always lived in tents until at last (owing to the inroads made by the Chaldean army) they were forced to come into Jerusalem, are described as being the first to undergo captivity, because after the freedom of their lonely life they found confinement in a city as bad as imprisonment.<sup>43</sup>

Jerome refers to the superscript of the above-mentioned psalm. He understands this title not as referring to the commanders who were taken captive, but, as I suggested above, as saying that the Rechabites were the first to be taken captive. However, he explains it differently: the words 'first to be led into captivity' do not mean that the Rechabites were the first to leave the land of Israel; rather, they describe the feeling which the Rechabites had when, on account of the Chaldean forces, they had to abandon their free way of living in tents and move into the confinement of city dwelling.

This understanding of the words 'led into captivity' also explains why the Rechabites, known to be obedient, live in the city in the Temple even though they were commanded not to dwell in houses but in tents. Jerome adheres to the biblical narrative of Jer. 35.11 in which the Rechabites

42. Gregor von Nazianz, *De Vita Sua: Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (ed. Christoph Jungck; Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1974), p. 69 l. 293.

43. Jerome, *Letters* no. 58, 5. The translation cited here is taken from 'Christian Classics Ethereal Library', electronic version.

actually lived in tents, but has them move into Jerusalem during the war. However, Jerome's understanding of the superscript does not seem to agree with its original meaning and reveals a conscious rejection of its plain sense.

In general, the known Christian references to start in the fourth century. The Rechabites are depicted as ascetics, and they are dealt with in connection to the superscript from Psalm 70.

As the Rechabites purportedly adhered to unique customs that can be interpreted as ascetic practices, their enhanced popularity at a time when the Christian monastic movement was escalating is not surprising. In the late fourth century the monastic movement was a phenomenon that could neither be overlooked in the Christian milieu, nor ignored politically or intellectually. This period and this milieu seem to provide fertile ground for the development of the story about the Rechabites. It has already been suggested above that a Jewish milieu is not the natural setting for this story; given the above and other factors, the logical conclusion is that the *History* is a Christian story.

The date of the text cannot be decisively determined, however. Nevertheless, one detail in Jerome's text has bearing on this question and should be examined more closely. Jerome says that the Rechabites 'drank neither wine nor strong drink' ('filii Rechab, qui vinum et siceram non bibebant'). Abstention from wine is already mentioned in the Bible in connection with the Rechabites, but 'strong drink' is not. This perhaps suggests that Jerome was familiar with this statement about the Rechabites from another text, possibly the *History*. If my earlier suggestion that Jerome's commentary on the superscript to the psalm reflects his rejection of a different interpretation—namely, the one put forward in the *History*—is correct, this leads to the conclusion that Jerome knew this text. Thus the work may be thought to have been composed before his day, that is, in the early fourth century. I can arrive at no more precise a conjecture regarding the date of the *History*. However, I wish to address one further issue concerning the cultural background of this story remains to be addressed.

#### 4. *The Jeremiah Literature*

The prophet Jeremiah and other characters from the biblical book of Jeremiah belong to the list of biblical figures who play the role of the hero in the extra-biblical pseudepigrapha. A number of ancient works center on events that took place during the time of Jeremiah: *inter alia*, *Paralei-*

*pomena Ieremiae*, 2 *Baruch*, 3 *Baruch*. These works are known as the Jeremiah–Baruch literature.<sup>44</sup> In 1997 D. Flusser put forward the following thesis in a review article.<sup>45</sup> He proposed that the *Paralipomena Ieremiae* is based on three characters from the biblical book of Jeremiah to whom a promise was given that they would be saved from the destruction: Jeremiah himself, Baruch and Ebedmelech the Kushite.<sup>46</sup> The prophecy for Jeremiah is ‘...they shall not overcome you; for I am with you—declares the Lord—to save you’ (Jer. 1.19); the one to Baruch is ‘For I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh—declares the Lord—but I will at least grant you your life in all the places where you may go’ (Jer. 45.5); and the one to Ebedmelech is Jeremiah is instructed by God to say to Ebedmelech: ‘I am going to fulfill my words concerning this city—for disaster, not for good... But I will save you on that day’ (Jer. 39.16-17). I suggest that a fourth character be added to the list of people who received a personal deliverance prophecy in the book of Jeremiah—namely, the sons of Rechab:

But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of your ancestor Jonadab, and kept all his precepts, and done all that he commanded you... Jonadab son of Rechab shall not lack a descendant to stand before me all the time. (Jer. 35.18-19)

This constitutes an explicit promise from God to the house of Rechab that their family shall exist forever. The apocryphon about the Rechabites describes how the children of Jonadab son of Rechab escaped the destruction and lived before God.

Thus, the *History* fits in well with other Jeremiah literature; the issues raised in the Jeremiah–Baruch literature are its issues as well: the call for repentance, praying for Jerusalem and the saving of the righteous. As their story is not mentioned or even alluded to in any of the other Jeremiah books, I consider them ‘latecomers’ to this literature, that is, as a text which

44. See my Introduction in M.E. Stone *et al.*, *Commentary on ‘The Life of Jeremiah’* (forthcoming); J.E. Wright, ‘Baruch, His Evolution from Scribe to Apocalyptic Seer’, in M.E. Stone and T.A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 264-89.

45. D. Flusser, ‘Review of Books’, *JSJ* 28 (1997), pp. 119-23.

46. Schulte put forward the thesis about a ‘personal salvation oracle’ in an article on the book of Jeremiah. He only includes in these oracles Baruch and Ebedmelech; cf. H. Schulte, ‘Baruch und Ebedmelech—Persönliche Heilsorakel im Jeremiabuche’, *BZ* 32 (1987), pp. 257-65. Apparently Flusser was not aware of Schulte’s work.

was composed later than the other works but in the same spirit and by an author familiar with the Jeremiah literature. It appears that the author of the *History* knew the *Paralipomena*. The *History* reports that Jeremiah ‘tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and put dust on his head’. These details do not appear in the Bible, but we find them in the *Paralipomena*, which states: ‘Jeremiah tore his clothes and put dust on his head’.<sup>47</sup> The author of the *History* apparently derived these details from the *Paralipomena*.

### 5. Summary

In the course of this article we observed that the *History* is deeply rooted in the milieu of late-antique literature. Its narrative features, such as a dialogue with a king which ends in the hero’s incarceration, a miraculous escape from prison and the removal of a pious group from a scene of a disaster, are known from other texts. The story in the apocryphon presents the Rechabites as Jews, Jews who lived before the coming of Jesus. This explains the lack of reference to Jesus in the apocryphon (the Syriac version ‘corrects’ this misgiving by stating that the news about Jesus was brought to the Rechabites by angels). Although the text presents a Jewish ‘atmosphere’ the story is not Jewish.

The similarities with the midrashic material about the Rechabites are not the result of direct literary dependence but a reflection of shared traditions or texts about the Rechabites. Traditions similar to those of the apocryphon are also found in Hegesippus. The *History* takes for granted a certain understanding of the superscript of Psalm 70 which describes the Rechabites as being first to be taken captive, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. This title is part of the Christian literary culture only and no traces of it are found in Jewish literature. It is clear that the biblical connection and the central issues differ in the Midrash and in the apocryphon; consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that the *History* is a Christian story.

It is also my conclusion that the story dates from the fourth century. The characterization of the Rechabites as some type of ascetic group corroborates this dating because it was during this period that the monastic movement flourished. I also suggested that Jerome was acquainted with this story, thus supporting my proposed dating.

47. *Paraleipomena Ieremiou* 2.1 in A.-E. Purinton and R. A. Kraft (eds. and trans.), *Paraleipomena Ieremiou* (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1972), p. 15: διέρρηξεν ὁ Ἰερεμίας τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπέθηκεν χοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ.

The *History* fits well with other known texts of the ‘Jeremiah–Baruch literature’. It appears that the author of the *History* was familiar with this literature and fashioned his story in the same spirit.

## APPENDIX:

KNIGHTS’ TRANSLATION OF THE *HISTORY OF THE RECHABITES*

(The numbering below follows that of the *Journey of Zosimos* in *OTP*)

[*Chapter 9 in the Journey of Zosimos*]

(1b) Hear, hear, O sons of men, from us who became blessed, because we also are from you. (2) For when Jeremiah the prophet proclaimed that the city Jerusalem shall be given into the hands of the destroyers, he tore his clothes, and girded himself with sackcloth around his waist, and sprinkled ashes upon his head, and around his waist, and sprinkled ashes upon his head, and put dirt on his bed. And he exhorted all the people to turn away from their evil way. (3) And our father Rechab, son of Aminadab, also heard (Jeremiah’s exhortation) and exhorted us, ‘Hear O sons of Rechab, and daughters of your father, and remove your clothes from your body, and do not drink a carafe of wine, and do not eat bread from the fire, and do not drink liquor and honey until the Lord hears your petition’. (4) And we said, ‘What he commanded us, let us do and obey’. (5) And we threw off our clothing from our body; and we did not eat bread from the fire, and did not drink a carafe of wine, neither honey nor liquor, and we lamented a great lament, and petitioned the Lord. (6) And he heard our prayer, and turned away his anger from the city Jerusalem. And mercy from the Lord came to the city Jerusalem; and he was merciful to his people, and turned away his death-bearing anger.

[*Chapter 10 in the Journey of Zosimos*]

(1) And the king said to us, ‘You have done well’. (2) ‘Now, then, mingle with my people, and eat bread, and drink wine, and glorify your Lord, and you will be obeying God and king.’ (3) But we said, ‘We do not disobey God’. (4) Then the king became angry; he placed us in prison. And we remained (there) throughout that night. (5) And, behold, a light shone in the cell, and an angel took the roof off of the prison, and seized the top of our head, and led us out from the prison, and placed us in (the) air, and carried us to the water of the river; then he said to us, ‘Wherever the water proceeds, you proceed, also’. (6) And we walked with the water and with the angel. (7) Then, when it carried us to this place, the river became dry, and the water was lost, and the place was split, and water came up out of the abyss. (8) And he surrounded this country, and a wall of cloud came and overshadowed the water. (9) And he did not scatter us all over the earth, but gave us this country.