

The «Women of Clement»: The Importance of Being a Woman in a Newly Recovered Pseudo-Clementine Fragment

Las «mujeres de Clemente»: la importancia de ser mujer
en un fragmento pseudoclementino recientemente recuperado

Marianna Cerno
<infallice@gmail.com>
Independent researcher

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ABSTRACT: An unknown fragment, whose discovery was announced in 2018 and whose edition is in print, provides us with a new perspective on the pseudo-Clementine topic. The recovered fragment, which is thought to date from the second half of the 4th century but is based on a main source from the 3rd century, describes the beginning of the Clementine saga, of which Rufinus' *Recognitiones* tells the end instead. In the fragment, a number of women stand out for their role, their characterisation, and their contribution to the development of events. These women are not only distinct in character and beliefs, but also in their customs. Despite these differences, they share certain values and virtues that facilitate the growth and maturation of the young Clement. The recovered fragment is an emblematic expression of the cultural melting pot and trans-religious environment of the early centuries of Christianity. It was also the most effective means by which the contents of the new religion were transmitted to and internalized by the most sensitive and receptive personalities of the pagan culture and mentality of the time: educated women.

KEYWORDS: Pope Clement I Romanus, pseudo-Clementine literature, Rufinus' *Recognitiones*, Late antique novel, Early Christian Apocrypha.

RESUMEN: Un fragmento desconocido, cuyo descubrimiento se anunció en 2018 y cuya edición está en imprenta, nos ofrece una nueva perspectiva sobre el tema pseudoclementino. El fragmento recuperado –que data probablemente de la segunda mitad del siglo IV, pero se basa en una fuente principal del siglo III– describe el comienzo de la saga clementina, de la que las *Recognitiones* de Rufino narran, en cambio, el final. En el fragmento, varias mujeres destacan por su papel, su caracterización y su contribución al desarrollo de los acontecimientos: diferentes no solo en carácter, sino también en creencias y costumbres, estas mujeres comparten ciertos valores interiores, los mismos que permiten al joven Clemente crecer y madurar. El fragmento recuperado es una expresión emblemática del crisol cultural y del ambiente transreligioso del judeocristianismo primitivo; fue también el medio más eficaz para que los contenidos de la nueva religión fueran transmitidos e interiorizados por las personalidades más sensibles y receptivas de la cultura y mentalidad paganas de la época: las mujeres cultas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Papa Clemente I Romano, literatura pseudo-clementina, *Recognitiones* de Rufino, novela tardía antigua, apócrifos paleocristianos.

In this paper, I present a reflection on two (and more) women who play a significant role in the saga of Clement I of Rome, whose story is known so far through two famous late antique writings, unique in terms of genre and structure: the *Recognitiones* by Rufinus of Concordia (or of Aquileia), a Latin translation of a lost Greek original, and the anonymous Greek *Homilies/Klementia*¹. The present study, however, focuses on a new source on the same subject: a fragment of the Pseudo-Clementine novel in an unknown version, likely to be evidence of a stage in the novel that preceded the revision or rewriting that has come down to us in Rufinus' translation. It contains those «resources of pagan novelists» that are typical of the late antique narrative and that the redactions in our possession have instead rejected, such as «illusion, fate deceit or erotic love»². This fragment, entitled *Gesta sancti Clementis* (hereafter *GsC*), deals specifically with the beginning of Clement's story, whose ending is narrated instead in the *Recognitiones* and the *Homilies*.

The text, which ends abruptly, is transmitted in an 18th century manuscript kept in Split and in two apographs of it, held in Split and Vienna, respectively. This manuscript is an authenticated copy of an earlier original, which, according to some misunderstandings in copying, was probably written in Beneventan script³.

The fragment is written in Latin, but some of the content suggests that it may have been translated from Greek⁴. Moreover, approximately one chapter of the *GsC* presents content that is also found at the beginning of Rufinus' *Recognitiones*. However, it should be noted that the *GsC* contains significant variants and insertions⁵. From a narratological standpoint, the most notable distinction is the use of the third person, with the narrator assuming the role of a historical investigator of Clement's identity. The narrative is presented as a compilation of information gathered from various sources, including oral and written accounts, which the narrator has meticulously researched. Despite the author's stated intention to present factual information, the text displays characteristics more akin to a novel, featuring an adventurous and composite plot, rich in dialogue, twists, and drama (*pathos*). It is during one of these dialogical interludes that Clement initiates the meditative soliloquy in the first person, which is also read – in a briefer and distinct form – at the commencement of the *Recognitiones* (It is important to recall that the *Recognitiones* are entirely composed in the first person and narrated by Clement himself).

A number of years have passed since I discovered the *GsC* fragment, and it soon became evident that an exhaustive examination of the fragment would require a considerable investment of time, particularly given the constraints on my possibility to dedicate not only full-time, but also daily, attention to it. Assumed the complex nature of the subject matter, it was my intention, subsequent to the initial research, to provide the academic

1. In the interest of convenience, this paper will adhere to the traditional designation *Homilies* for the text, despite the fact that recent studies have also designated it as *Klementia*.

2. Quotation from Edwards (1992: 459).

3. The details of the discovery and the characteristics of the manuscript transmission in Cerno (2017).

4. The most evident clue is an explanation provided by the narrator which specifies that in Latin, the words for «evil» and «apple» are identical (*malum*).

5. The section of the *GsC* extending from the second part of the third chapter to the first half of the subsequent chapter corresponds to the initial portion of Rufinus' work [Rufin. *Clement.*, I 1-7; ed. Strecker – Rehm (1994: 6-10)]. In the forthcoming edition Cerno (2025), the two texts will be presented in a synoptic format.

community with a concise account of the findings, thus facilitating the dissemination of the discovery of the fragment⁶.

Then, given that one of the text's most notable characteristics is that it is a composite work, with the narrative interspersed with various smaller writings – primarily letters that are collectively known as New Testament apocrypha – it seemed preferable to devote specific articles to chosen parts or themes of the fragment. The first outcome of this endeavour is the paper dedicated to the *Letter of Lentulus*, an apocryphal missive concerning the appearance of Jesus. Due to its length, the paper was divided into two parts, the second of which remains in print⁷.

The present paper represents a further, different monographic study on the fragment, undertaken in conjunction with the ISSR Conference held in Bertinoro in 2022.

It is thus worthwhile to present the *GsC* fragment in its essential elements in order to facilitate discussion of the main topic of this article. The fragment is currently awaiting publication in 2025, along with an Italian translation and an introductory study⁸.

I will begin by providing a concise overview of the plot:

The fragment first introduces Clement's parents, Faustinus and Matthidia, respectively a member of and related to the Julio-Claudian imperial family. It goes on to describe their virtues and notable deeds. Subsequently, the text recounts the circumstances of the future Pope's birth, which was marked by a multitude of miracles. It then describes his childhood, during which Clement, who had two older twin brothers, was brought up with great care by his mother and an experienced nurse, Marcia. The narrator initially focuses on the adults in the family, revealing the unhealthy love that arises and explodes in Flavius, Matthidia's brother-in-law and Faustinus' brother. This situation becomes unbearable for Matthidia, who decides to flee with the twins. However, a tragic shipwreck results in the separation of the mother from her offspring. Clement, Faustinus and Flavius remain in Rome. The latter, unable to forget Matthidia, sets out to find her, but after a year he is forced to return to Rome without success. He then confesses the affair to his brother, but reverses the roles and the blame. Despite his dismay, Faustinus entrusts Clement to his sister Demetriades and sets off on his own. Having been deprived of any contact with his father during his formative years, Clement, now an adult, encounters Barnabas preaching in Rome and decides to consult Jesus in Palestine in order to ascertain the fate of his family. He is dispatched by Emperor Tiberius to the headquarters of the local governor, Pontius Pilate, who is instructed to fulfil Clement's every desire. However, only a few weeks prior, Pilate had sanctioned the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the governor's wife, Claudia Procula, who welcomes Clement and, recognising in the young man a pure soul, introduces him to the life of Christ.

As can be observed, the account recounts Clement's journey from his birth to his arrival in Judea. The style may be described as that of a late antique novel. This includes descriptions of adventurous and romantic plots, erudite and etiological insertions, and the use of narrative devices such as deception, daring escapes, omens and premonitory dreams. The narrative, which comprises approximately thirty manuscript pages, contains numerous details that are largely consistent with those presented in the *Recognitiones*

6. Cerno (2017).

7. The first part is Cerno (2021); the second part is forthcoming.

8. Cerno (2025).

and the *Homilies*. Nevertheless, it offers insights that enhance our understanding of the subject matter.

The fragment is divided into five chapters and is a highly complex text, comprising significant apocryphal elements and topics. Moreover, these contents are found in different forms or versions from those that are currently known. To illustrate, the fragment contains correspondence between the Emperor Tiberius and Pontius Pilate, as well as the cited *Letter of Lentulus* regarding the appearance of Jesus.

Furthermore, the entire fragment appears to be a reported speech, introducing an additional layer that may conceal updates and alterations to the original text, combined with the textual disturbances typical of the paraphrastic process, which further complicates the study and dating of the text. The preceding prologue provides some insight into this situation. An unidentified presbyter from Salona (present-day Split, in the Dalmatian region of Croatia) presents to his congregation a text, in part abridged by himself, that the bishop of Aquileia, Hermagoras, had sent to that church at an unspecified point in the past.

The figure of Bishop Hermagoras is named in a way that allows one to posit a date of composition of the fragment by the presbyter of Salona between the 4th and 6th centuries. Indeed, Hermagoras was a bishop of Aquileia who lived in the latter part of the 3rd century and became a legendary martyr of the era of Nero from the end of the 6th century onwards. The findings so far indicate that the fragment may predate or, at the very least, be contemporary with the early-5th-century Latin translation of the *Recognitiones* by Rufinus. It may additionally represent a section of an alternative version of the *Recognitiones* referenced by Rufinus in his prologue to Bishop Gaudentius (*in Graeco... duas editiones... et duo corpora esse librorum*)⁹. It is evident that the perspective of the priest of Salona, who recovered the text of the *GsC* and presented it to his congregation, is not that of a theologian or an ecclesiastic seeking to justify or establish a succession to the papal seat. From the *GsC*, it becomes evident that the figure of Clement occupies a pivotal position, serving as a model for the Christian community in times of adversity¹⁰.

Moreover, the author's (i.e., Hermagoras') perspective on the characters and the cultural environment of reference allows for the possibility of such an early dating. In essence, this entails an analysis of the underlying mentality that informs the construction and fruition of the text.

In comparison to the extant pseudo-Clementine texts, the fragment of the *GsC* is distinguished by a greater narrative dynamism and, as will be demonstrated in this paper, a more diverse range of perspectives. Moreover, the fragment of the *GsC* displays a heightened level of vivacity and tension, largely due to the more pronounced involvement of female figures who play pivotal roles in the lives of Clement and other key characters. The two principal women of the narrative are Matthidia, Clement's mother, and Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate. The fragment provides greater insight into their characters than is evident from the limited and sparse information available from known sources.

9. Rufin. *Clement.*, prol.; ed. Simonetti (1961: 281, lines 35-36). The matter is discussed in depth and with the required degree of caution in the introduction to the forthcoming edition, Cerno (2025).

10. The prologue of the *GsC* thus appears to indicate that the (pseudo)-Clementine tradition is not aligned with the context of «apostle Peter's exemplary authority» and «ecclesial normativity» that surrounded the Latin *Recognitiones* from the 6th century onwards [Campbell (2024); quotes from p. 467].

Matthidia

The first character to be introduced is Matthidia, Clement's mother, who plays the role of protagonist in the opening chapter of the fragment. Here, Matthidia's role is expanded upon in greater detail than was initially mentioned in the Greek *Homily* 12, which corresponds to the first 24 chapters of the seventh book of the *Recognitiones*. In the *GsC* fragment, the portrait of Matthidia initially emerges between the lines of a speech whose principal subject is Faustinus, Clement's father¹¹. A number of statements are made about him, including that he was of noble birth, that he was close to the emperor, that he received both scholastic and military training alongside Tiberius, the heir to the throne, who is his relative and close friend. Additionally, the text refers to his marriage:

(GsC 1.4) Dein [Faustinus] anno sequenti, Balbo et Vetere consulibus, cum Augustus Tiberium tribunitiae potestatis in quinquennium consortem fecisset, atque Armeniae quae a Romanis defecerat praeficere voluisset, recusante illius curam Tiberio atque Rhodum per speciem disciplinae capiendae secessum meditante ut apud Augustum praeter Liviam matrem, etiam Faustinum propinquum suum rerum suarum curatorem haberet, Matthidiam eidem Aniciae gentis virginem apud Liviam gratiosam atque acceptissimam matrimonio iungit addita ad puellae dotem affatim opimam, multa suppellectili magnifica, et mundo pretioso plurimo.

Then in the following year, under the consulship of Balbus and Vetus, after Augustus had appointed Tiberius his colleague in the office of tribune for the next five years, and wished to give him the command of Armenia, which had separated from the Romans, as Tiberius refused to administer it and contemplated retiring to Rhodes under the pretext of perfecting his education, to have with Augustus, apart from his mother Livia, also Faustinus as his relative as curator of his assets, [the latter] married Matthidia, a virgin of the same Anicia family, who enjoyed Livia's favour and was very welcome to her, after having increased the dowry of the girl, who was already very rich, with a series of splendid furnishings and many precious objects.

This is Matthidia's first appearance in the text. After a further segment of text focusing on Faustinus, the section devoted to the woman begins:

(GsC 1.6) Iam vero Matthidia geminum stirpis virilis Faustinus partum ediderat, Faustinum nimirum et Faustinianum; rursusque cum esset gravida parere se gigantem face quadam de coelo delapsa cuncta deorum templa succendentem, visa est in somnis, iussa quoque recte de futura prole sperare atque commonita de nomine. Illa ostento vehementer

11. In the Greek *Homilies*, Clement's father is referred to as Faustinus, whereas the twins are named Faustus and Faustinianus. Conversely, in Rufinus' *Recognitiones*, Faustinianus is identified as the father, while Faustus and Faustinus are the twins. It is worthy of note that a passage from the *GsC* also contains the variant 'Faustus' as the name of the son, who in the preceding part of the fragment was the father's namesake. This single passage provides evidence regarding the onomastic form of the *Homilies*. However, it does not elucidate whether the situation remains consistent or reverts to homonymy between the father and one of the twins, as Clement's relatives are no longer referenced prior to the fragment's interruption. The discrepancy in the spelling of the names of the family members, including Matthidia herself (spelled as Mattidia in Rufinus' translation), and the presence of the apocryphal correspondence between Tiberius and Pilate, suggest a link to the Eastern pseudo-Clementine tradition rather than to Rufinus' translation.

perculsa licet animo aliquandiu agitasset narraret necne marito quod viderat, tamen silentio praeterire deliberat usque dum peperisset.

Then Matthidia gave birth to Faustinus two male twins, Faustinus and Faustianus, and while she was pregnant again, she dreamed of giving birth to a giant who set fire to all the temples of the gods with a kind of torch that had come down from the sky, as she was ordered to have good hopes for her future child and was told the name [she would give him]. Deeply shaken by such miracle, although she occasionally considered whether or not to tell her husband what she had seen, nevertheless she decides to keep the matter secret until the child was born.

The premonitory dream represents the inaugural occurrence among a series of exceptional indications and happenings that surround the birth of Clement, with Matthidia assuming a role akin to that of a co-protagonist:

- The birth is characterised by a rapid onset and minimal discomfort (*GsC* 1.7: So, as I said, Matthidia gave birth to Clement on that same day, with such ease and happiness that it did not seem that she was giving birth, but rather that she had found him, as if he had fallen from the sky);
- Upon the birth of Clement, the house is shaken (*ibidem*: And as soon as the baby came out, immediately the whole floor of the house shook);
- The statues of the goddesses Juno and Lucina collapse at Matthidia's feet (*GsC* 1.8: Then the statues of Juno and Lucina, which the midwife had carefully and secretly brought into the room, fell prostrate at Matthidia's feet).

In the initial mention of Matthidia in the fragment, the woman is akin to a parenthesis within the narrative. This is followed by the resumption of the account of Faustinus' activities at the time of Clement's birth. Further on in the fragment, Matthidia assumes a more prominent role, beginning with the description of her pregnancy period. This includes a series of extraordinary events that take place after Clement's birth:

- In the temple of Juno, a voice thunders about Clement;
- At the temple of Ceres, a crow speaks to Matthidia and reveals that Clement will be a disaster for the goddess;
- During a celebration of the goddess Minerva, as Clement is being brought into the temple (where in addition to Matthidia, Livia, the wife of the Emperor Augustus and mother of Tiberius, is also present) the voice of Minerva herself says that she is defeated, and the statue's shield falls to the ground. The priestesses interpret this as a favourable omen for the war of Tiberius and Faustinus against the Dalmatians. However, Matthidia is aware that this is actually about Clement. Upon returning home, she informs her husband of her suspicions and resolves not to enter a temple again with the child.

The character of Matthidia that we see in these pages is different from the desperate and pain-devoured woman that we read in the corresponding passages of the *Recognitiones* and the *Homilies*, when she tells, miserable, about her past. These two apparently distant portraits are brought closer together in the second chapter of the recovered fragment, which describes how Flavius, Faustinus' brother, falls in love with the woman. In these lines, the same characteristics of Matthidia appear as in *Homily* 13, where, among the virtues of the woman, her chastity is most emphasised. In the *GsC* it is stated that it is the demons who rage against Clement's parents, and they start precisely from this falling

in love. Until that moment, Flavius, Faustinus' brother, had loved Matthidia very much, but with a chaste love, because of her uprightness of conduct, and he was loved by her in return, as one loves a relative. But the demons corrupt the man's pure affection and dip it in the poison extracted from Matthidia's beauty, so that, completely enraptured by the woman's extraordinary charm, he is seized by ardent desire, he pines for her and confesses that he loves her. Initially, Matthidia regards the situation as a jest and responds with a degree of self-mockery. However, upon receiving a second declaration of love, she is taken aback. She inquires as to the transgression she has committed and the actions that could have led Flavius to believe she was unchaste, before offering an apology for her actions. She also mentions her faith in the gods: she appears devout and pious. Flavius commends her virtue but also attempts to seduce her, and she is aware of his intentions. Initially, Matthidia presents a facade of composure, yet she eschews any opportunity for solitude, surrounds herself with matrons for protection, and employs dissembling tactics (*GsC* 2.3-2.5). However, this facade of theatrical pretence cannot persist indefinitely. As Flavius intensifies his passion, Matthidia simultaneously becomes increasingly rigid, ultimately reaching a point where she is unable to tolerate the mounting tension and decides to depart with the twins (*GsC* 2.8-2.10). In these paragraphs of the *GsC*, Matthidia is akin to a tragic heroine, experiencing a state of moral anguish, caught between the personal afflictions she endures and the imperative to safeguard the collective honour of her family:

(*GsC* 2.8-2.9) «*Quo me vertam?*» inquit [Matthidia] «*Quid faciam? Si rem viro revelo inimicitarum inter fratres discordiarum et belli causam dabo, sed et generi tum illorum tum meo infamiae notam inussero. Si taceo, periculum maius subibo, ubi quod ipsa patefacere vereor procedente die tum alii tum Faustinus ipse animadverberint. Etenim ad ceteras miserias etiam de fide mea recte is potuerit dubitare. Tempus omnia nudat. Coniugii fides minimo violatur delicto, at vero non vitatur fides si salus, si lectus, si pudor, si amor iugalis diligentissime servatur, sed alia quoque tacendi causa est iustissima. Quid enim, si posteaquam edixero maritus fratrem sollicitati cubilis insimulatus fuerit, is obiectum crimen in me retuderit? Spretus amor nescit servare modum; laesus saepe in odium vertitur. Ferendum ergo, ut morbus tollatur causa submovenda est. Insanum praesentiae partum crudelis enecet absentia*». *Huiusmodi cogitationum fluctibus exagitata, Urbem simul et coniugem ad tempus relinquere deliberat, atque ut id obtinere facilius valeat, somnium fingit.*

«Where should I turn? – she said – What should I do? If I reveal the fact to my husband, I shall be the cause of discord between brothers, of quarrels and of wars, and moreover I shall bring a stain of shame on their family as well as on mine. On the other hand, if I remain silent, I shall expose myself to a greater danger for in time both the others and Faustinus himself will understand what I am ashamed to reveal. And indeed, in addition to the other misfortunes, he might well have doubted my integrity. Time reveals all things. Marital fidelity is betrayed by a trivial fault; and truly, fidelity is not violated when integrity, marriage, honesty, conjugal love are preserved with the utmost scruple... but precisely the other reason for keeping silent is the most correct. What would happen if, having declared that my husband had accused his brother of attempting to defile the conjugal bed, he denied the accusation against me? Rejected love does not know how to keep its measure. Hurt often turns into hatred. We must therefore endure; for the disease to disappear, the cause must be removed. A cruel absence kills the sick fruit of a cruel presence». Moved by similar thoughts, she decides to leave Rome and her husband for a while, and to make it easier she invents a dream.

Matthidia is able to devise a plan that, despite the necessity for personal sacrifices, the potential for her own suffering and feelings of distress, is perceived as a means of safeguarding the honour of the entire family. This passage serves to illustrate the value placed on the woman and her adherence to high moral standards. Matthidia thus elects to withhold the truth from her husband by feigning a prophetic dream in which she was enjoined to depart within three days, on pain of the death of the entire family, and to return only after a new, illuminating dream had informed her. The character of Matthidia in this text is distinct from her portrayal in the *Recognitiones*. While the latter depicts a woman grappling with the pain of losing her family's affection, this new portrayal is characterised by a more complete and multifaceted representation of female resilience.

In the opening passages of the narrative, Matthidia is revealed to be a cunning and deceitful character, employing ruses and dissimulation to safeguard her loved ones and uphold her own moral standards. The character in question is depicted as a woman of strong moral principles, capable of standing her ground and asserting her autonomy without compromising her ethics. Matthidia's relationship with her husband is illustrative of this approach to life, characterised by mutual respect. This is demonstrated by his readiness to consider her aspirations, repose trust in the auguries she articulates and concur with her resolutions.

In this regard, it seems pertinent to emphasise the distinctive portrayal of the relationship between couples presented in the *GsC*.

It can be reasonably inferred from the text that the narrator is attempting to persuade the pagan audience to align with his perspective. This is evidenced by the emphasis placed on the shared virtues of Matthidia and Claudia Procula. In examining the treatment of the two women by their husbands, it becomes evident that Pilate does not initially acknowledge the value of his wife's contributions until he encounters insurmountable challenges. This attitude, however, rather than providing information on the narrator's (and his social context's) consideration of the woman, appears to differentiate the two men in terms of their characterisation. On the one hand, Faustinus is depicted as a figure who later converted to Christianity (a model of behaviour that will also emerge in later hagiographies). On the other hand, Pilate is portrayed as a man who not only does not convert, but who is complicit in the condemnation of Jesus through his actions.

In returning to the description of Matthidia as a woman, it will be of interest to observe what becomes evident as the narrative progresses. Following the requisite preparations and formal farewells, Matthidia departs with the twins, in accordance with the established ceremonial norms that are repeatedly underscored throughout the fragment. These paragraphs of the *GsC* illustrate another facet of Matthidia's character: her role as a mother and educator, as well as her status as a cultivated and refined woman, capable of appreciating the intricacies and richness of the cultural and historical legacy of the Roman world. So the vessel proceeds along the Tyrrhenian coastline towards Greece:

(*GsC* 2.13) *Hic Matthidia iubet filios Vergilii Aeneidos librum septimum lectitare, mone-
tque nauclerum commostraret pueris quae quo loco gesta fuisse poeta describit et quae
digna essent alia adderet.*

Here Matthidia orders his children to read once again the seventh book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and invites the shipowner to indicate to the children which deeds the poet says took place in which place, and to add any other information worth mentioning.

The narrative then proceeds with an account of the coastal environment of the Tyrrhenian Sea, while simultaneously re-presenting the passages from the *Aeneid* that pertain to these landscapes. In addition to the evident Virgilian allusion, the author of the *GsC* makes considerable use of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*. The journey is characterised by a sense of idyllic tranquillity until the abrupt occurrence of the shipwreck.

(*GsC* 2.20) *Is ipse Leviathan qui Matthidiae castitatem in deliciis expugnare nequiverat, experiri vult si forte bonis omnibus spoliata, famulis ac liberis orbatam, paupertate pressam summaque necessitate astrictam ad prostituendam pudicitiam detrudere valeret.*

It is precisely that Leviathan who had failed to win Matthidia's purity amidst the allurements that wants to test whether he might be able to remove her, once deprived of all possessions, estranged from servants and children, oppressed by poverty and forced by extreme necessity to compromise his virtue.

As we know from the *Recognitiones* and the *Homilies*, everyone dies in the shipwreck except Matthidia and the twins, who are separated from her by the currents. Shipwrecked in Arados, Matthidia is literally showered with offers of hospitality from the townspeople, who compete to welcome a woman who, even in the most adverse and desperate of circumstances, shows obvious nobility and gentleness¹². Matthidia is unable to reach a decision and, as a result, elects to take up residence with an elderly widow of limited means. In doing so, she formally and politely declines the other offers that were made to her. Meanwhile, the twins are found by pirates and taken to Caesarea Stratonis, where they are sold as slaves to a rich widowed noblewoman. Thus, enters the character of Justa (Iusta), who, although unaware of the children's noble birth (the pirates had in fact threatened them never to reveal their true identity to Justa), takes care of the twins as her own and gives them the new names of Nicetas and Aquila¹³. At this point in the text, the author of the *GsC*, reporting to his faithful a text he had received from a bishop of Aquileia called Hermagoras, declares:

(*GsC* 2.24-25) *Hoc loco Hermagoras Matthidiae labores corporisque et animi afflictiones enumerat, laudat tollerantiam, constantiam miratur, studium denique extollit et mirificam*

12. In the *Homilies* and *Recognitiones*, Matthidia is described as having mutilated herself in desperation, having bitten her hands until they became useless. In the corresponding section, the *GsC* presents an epitomised part in which the presbyter of Salona reports the contents of the text of Hermagoras referring to what happens after Matthidia agrees to live with the poor widow. The text describes the woman's internal struggles and physical exhaustion, her remarkable fortitude, and a poignant monologue. However, the presbyter's focus is on the woman's unwavering resilience, which encompasses not only her ability to endure pain but also her commitment to maintaining her honourable integrity despite temptations (cf. *infra*).

13. In the *GsC*, both Justa and the woman who welcomes Matthidia are presented as widows. However, whereas the latter is poor, Justa is noble and rich. This contrast is highlighted in the short passage of the *GsC* 2.23: *Hic illa [i.e. Matthidia], moerore gravissimo pressa, illis pro officio gratiam refert, et aegre tandem ad pauperem quandam viduam illius praecibus fracta concessit, ac pauperem cum paupere per annos fere sex et viginti vitam egit. Filii quoque a piratis inventi atque Caesaream Stratonis advecti, viduae cuidam sed clarae atque opulenti servorum numero venditi fuerunt, et Nicetae alter, alter Aquilae nomine appellati* (At this point she [i.e. Matthidia], overwhelmed by a very heavy grief, thanked them according to the formality, and reluctantly, overcome by her prayers, finally gave herself up to a poor widow, and lived as a poor woman with the poor woman for about twenty-six years. Her sons, found by the pirates and taken to Caesarea Strato, were also sold as slaves to a widow, a noble and rich one, and were named Nicetas and Aquila).

vigilantiam commendat, qua sese a turpitudine saepius tentata immunem semper servavit. Refert insuper nonnulla eiusdem monologia quae aut vix aut plane nullo modo siccis oculis quispiam perlegerit. Tanta est miseriarum commemoratio et nunc sui ipsius nunc deorum dearumque incusatio vocibus amaris lugubri lamentatione mussitata, denique omnem rationem atque exactae vitae seriem narrat, quam hic repetere longum esset.

At this point, Hermagoras lists Matthidia's physical hardships and inner torments, praises her endurance, admires her perseverance, and finally magnifies her zeal and emphasises her admirable attentiveness, thanks to which she always kept herself pure, although she was repeatedly tempted by dishonour. He also recounts some of her soliloquies, which no one can read to the end without crying, whether in private or in public. So great is the recollection of her misfortunes, so great is the sorrow, now for herself, now for the gods and goddesses, muttered in bitter tones with a mournful lamentation; in short, she recounts every episode and the succession of events she experienced, which it would take a long time to repeat here¹⁴.

This represents the point of deepest connection between the strong character of Matthidia at the beginning of the fragment and that of the desperate woman of the *Recognitiones*. With this note, the curtain falls on Matthidia, who no longer features in the *GsC* fragment, except for a brief mention by Clement in conversation with Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate, who had previously been linked to the protagonist's mother by a bond of friendship.

Moreover, this passage illustrates the greater prominence of Matthidia in the original text, in comparison to the significant reduction made by the presbyter of Salona, who, from the prologue onwards, makes it clear that he intends to propose the exemplary figure of Clement to his congregation. This shift in perspective is particularly noteworthy in the context of the pseudo-Clementine material that survived in the following centuries¹⁵.

In this regard, it is possible to propose a further observation regarding the ways in which the character of Matthidia is presented in the *GsC*.

Indeed, recent criticism has emphasised how Matthidia's representation in the *Homilies* exemplifies redemption and is subtly juxtaposed with the narrative of Eve's transgression¹⁶. The fragment of the *GsC* allows us to make a further analytical advance. Here,

14. The details of Hermagoras' account of Matthidia cannot be deduced from this abbreviation by the presbyter of Salona. However, from the short text that precedes this passage, it is clear that Matthidia remains beautiful and full of noble dignity even after the shipwreck, a detail that is not found in the *Recognitiones* and in the *Homilies*, where the woman is disfigured by the disaster. We read in *GsC* 2.22-23: *Orta luce, Aradienses Matthidiam tristem lamentantem suam atque liberorum sortem deplorantem conspiciunt, nuditatem illius tegunt, casum solantur. Cumque aliam se atque esset et genere et patriam diceret, ingenuam vero ipsa corporis forma, sermonis urbanitas, animi modestia atque in maxima perturbatione maxima in omnibus compositio testarentur; multae illius oppidi nobiles feminae hospitio illam accipere cupiebant* (When the sun rose, the people of Aradus saw Matthidia lamenting in grief and despair over her own fate and that of her children; they covered her nakedness and consoled her for her misfortune. And when she said that she was a foreigner, and explained her origin and her country, and since the appearance of her body, the elegance of her speech, the gentleness of her soul, and the greatest composure in every respect at the moment of greatest turmoil testified to her free condition, many noblewomen of that city wished to give her hospitality).

15. In her analysis of the *Homilies*, Patricia A. Duncan highlights the pivotal role of Matthidia's character as a source of inspiration for the *Grundschrift*: Duncan (2020: 173).

16. Duncan (2020).

Matthidia is presented with the characteristics of the Virgin Mary in an equally implicit manner. Matthidia is presented with a vision in which she hears a voice foretelling the birth of her extraordinary child and is informed of the name that will be bestowed upon him. This parallels the account of the archangel Gabriel in the Gospel narrative. Additionally, Matthidia experiences an extraordinary pregnancy, replete with divine signs and omens of which she alone is aware of the true meaning. She maintains absolute secrecy regarding these occurrences, in a manner analogous to Luke's recounting of the experiences of the Virgin Mary. Moreover, Matthidia's primary values are chastity and modesty. These are not merely the intrinsic virtues of a late antique matron, as the text of the *GsC* repeatedly emphasises that Matthidia not only entered into marriage as a virgin but remained a perpetual virgin in the manner of a vestal. The theme of virginity is then revisited in the concluding section of the fragment, where it is addressed from a doctrinal perspective. This section deals with the physical and effective virginity of Mary.

It can thus be stated that Matthidia is presented in the *Homilies* and the *GsC* in accordance with the model of the Virgin Mary, who is referred to as the «new Eve» (*Homilies*) and chosen for an event that will have a transformative impact on humanity (*GsC*). In this context, Clement also assumes the characteristics of Jesus Christ (at least in the *GsC*), according to a process of imitation that will be codified with greater precision between late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This process involves the reservation of certain prerogatives exclusively for Mary and Jesus, while for the rest it becomes a hagiographic practice¹⁷. It can thus be argued that even the manner of characterisation provides evidence of the antiquity of the *GsC*.

Claudia Procula¹⁸

The fragment of the *GsC* goes on to describe the events that have transpired in Rome during this period. In an effort to assuage his brother's enthusiasm and perhaps find some respite for himself, Flavius informs Faustinus that Matthidia had long harboured a profound infatuation for him and that she subsequently fled and ultimately perished by drowning. However, Faustinus persists in his endeavours and seeks counsel from astrologers and soothsayers. Each response, although accurate, indicates that Matthidia is alive and well. Consequently, Faustinus decides to depart, despite the repeated admonitions regarding the considerable challenges that such a journey would entail. Faustinus thus leaves 12-year-old Clement in the care of his own sister, Demetriades, who was already a priestess of Vesta and vowed to perpetual chastity. This represents another poignant farewell, although it should be noted that, during the course of his absence, Faustinus does not even write to his son.

Following a considerable period of time, Clement was inspired by Barnabas' public preaching in Rome and resolved to depart. He sought to meet Jesus and ascertain the fate of his family. He meticulously planned his journey, even arranging for the oversight of his property in Rome (in the *Recognitiones*, in contrast, the departure is precipitous). Tiberius

17. A more detailed examination of this significant topic can be found in the introduction to the critical edition, Cerno (2025).

18. The character of Claudia Procula, or Procla, appears anonymously both in the Gospel of Matthew, the only one of the canonical Gospels to mention her (Mt 27:19-20), and in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, also called the *Acts of Pilate*, an apocryphal work dated by scholars to the 4th century. But it is only in the *GsC* that Pilate's wife is given so much space and such a distinctive description.

facilitated Clement's arrival in Judea by arranging letters of introduction. Additionally, Tiberius entrusted Clement with a diplomatic task to be completed on his journey to the East. Approximately one year later, having surmounted a series of unforeseen challenges, Clement arrived in Judea and presented Pilate with Tiberius' letter of recommendation. In this document, the emperor asserted that the young Clement was akin to a son to him and that he should be treated with the utmost respect and that his every request should be granted. However, the protagonist's request pertains to an audience with Jesus, who had been ordered by Pilate to be crucified a few weeks earlier.

At this point in the narrative, Claudia Procula makes an appearance. Pilate, in a state of distress, turns to her because he believes that the meeting with Jesus is a mere pretext and that Clement is, in fact, an emissary of Tiberius who has arrived in Judea with the intention of punishing him for his misdeed.

Similar to Matthidia, Claudia Procula takes control of the critical situation and determines the optimal solution: she orchestrates her husband's escape at dawn, defended by an armed guard, and fabricates an emergency in the area as a pretext. Meanwhile, she began to communicate with Clement on a direct, personal level, engaging in discourse and attempting to ascertain his intentions and mental state.

(GsC 4.19) Annuente Pilato monet Claudia ut bene mane cum certo militum numero quasi necessitate ductus clam Ierosolyma egrederetur. Cum ille paruisset et iam Clemens vacaret accessit ad illum Procula et post verborum officia cum de multis rogasset et responsum tulisset denique percontatur si quem adhuc etiam tum nuntium de statu eventuve parentum alicunde accepisset. Cum Clemens nullum unquam se audire potuisse dixisset, atque una ea potissimum de causa se in Iudaeam contulisse, ut aliquid certi de illis ex Iesu propheta cognoscere valeret, Claudia vim magnam profundens lacrymarum atque aliquantisper conticescens in haec post paulo lamenta sese dedit.

Since Pilate agreed, Claudia suggested that he and a certain number of soldiers should sneak out of Jerusalem early in the morning, as if it were an emergency. As Pilate had obeyed, and Clement was now standing there in suspense, Procula approached him and, after the pleasantries, after asking him many questions and receiving many answers, finally asked him if he had received any news from anywhere about the condition and fate of his parents. When Clement replied that he had never been able to find out anything [about his parents and brothers], and that he had come to Judea for one reason only, to learn something certain about them from the prophet Jesus, Claudia, shedding a great flood of tears, fell silent for a few moments, and after a short time gave in to these groans.

In the brief passage in which she is the protagonist, Procula serves the function of conveying the Christian story. Through her, Clement hears a sort of paraphrase of the Gospels, from Jesus' birth to Herod's death and the Holy Family's return to Nazareth, which marks the end of the fragment.

The portrait of Procula, Pilate's wife, is concise yet more detailed than that of Matthidia, as the author selectively incorporates the most pertinent information about Pilate's wife. In contrast, Matthidia's characterisation is revealed through a lengthy description, which consequently allows the reader to gain insight into Matthidia's character gradually and indirectly. However, this is not present in the surviving text, which has been drastically shortened by the anonymous presbyter of Salona.

In comparison to Matthew's account, where Procula is a mere fleeting apparition and is not even mentioned by name¹⁹, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (or *Acts of Pilate*) also devotes fewer words to the woman²⁰. However, the *GsC* fragment offers a significant amount of new information about the dream that Pilate's wife had the night before Jesus' interrogation.

This is the only version of the story in which the content of Procula's dream is at least somewhat clear. It is a vision (*visio*) sent by God, that is, by Jesus himself, in which the woman sees her husband's dramatic fate - a terrible death, we can imagine - and therefore tries to persuade him not to condemn Jesus. This version is consistent with that of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and with the Coptic sermon attributed to Evodius of Rome: what is a divine message for the protagonists - and for the mentality of the users of this story - is also described from the point of view of the Jews, for whom the event is the work of a magician.

The *GsC*, like the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, represent a source in which a multiplicity of perspectives are maintained, encompassing a range of mentalities and conceptions. During the early Middle Ages, these perspectives coalesced into a unified, exclusively Christian perspective. This new perspective sought to represent alternative points of view as deviations, flawed practices, and distortions of the truth. This phenomenon can be observed, for example, in certain apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and it also persists in later martyrial Passions.

In the earliest texts, cultural and mental frameworks are interwoven, with traditions and ways of seeing that coexist influencing one another. This dynamic leads to the emergence of a dominant way of thinking, exemplified by the Christian perspective, which eventually supplants the others. This characteristic of maintaining different points of view and engaging in an intercultural dialogue that encompasses not only the Jewish perspective but also that of pagan thought is, in my estimation, one of the most significant points from a literary perspective for determining the date of the fragment to the first centuries of the Christian era.

19. Mt 27:19: *sedente autem illo pro tribunali misit ad illum uxor eius dicens: Nihil tibi et iusto illi; multa enim passa sum hodie per visum propter eum* (And as he was sitting in the place of judgment, his wife sent to him, saying: «Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him»).

20. *Gest. Pilat.*, II, 1; ed. Tischendorf (1853: 322-323): *Videns autem Pilatus, timor apprehendit eum, et statim voluit surgere de tribunali. Haec autem eo cogitante, ut surgeret et abiret, misit ad illum uxor sua dicens: Nihil tibi et homini isti iusto: multa enim passa sum propter eum in hac nocte. Convocans autem Pilatus Iudaeos dixit eis: Scitis quia mulier mea cultrix dei est et in iudaismo magis vobiscum sentit. Dicunt ei Iudaei: Ita est et nos scimus. Dicit eis Pilatus Ecce misit ad me uxor mea dicens: Nihil tibi et iusto illi: multa enim passa sum propter eum in hac nocte. Respondentes autem Iudaei dixerunt Pilato: Numquid non diximus tibi quia magus est? Ecce somniorum fantasma misit ad uxorem tuam.* English translation by James (1924: 98): Now when Pilate saw it he was afraid, and sought to rise up from the judgement-seat. And while he yet thought to rise up, his wife sent unto him, saying: Have thou nothing to do with this just man, for I have suffered many things because of him by night. And Pilate called unto him all the Jews, and said unto them: Ye know that my wife feareth God and favoureth rather the customs of the Jews, with you? They say unto him: Yea, we know it. Pilate saith unto them: Lo, my wife hath sent unto me, saying: Have thou nothing to do with this just man: for I have suffered many things because of him by night. But the Jews answered and said unto Pilate: Said we not unto thee that he is a sorcerer? behold, he hath sent a vision of a dream unto thy wife.

Slightly different is the *recensio Byzantina M* edited by Dubois (2005: 264, 268): here the contents are separated into two paragraphs far apart and several details of Procula's dream are missing.

In this regard, the *GsC* offer significant clarification regarding hitherto obscure or ambiguous aspects of Procula's character, including her religious beliefs.

Following an initial interest in Judaism (a detail also documented in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*), the *GsC* report that Procula embraced Christianity as a result of a prophetic dream concerning her husband's destiny, which she experienced on the night of Jesus' betrayal:

(GsC 4.17-18) Nocte illa quae Salvatoris captura sputis colaphisque sacrata veneratur, quaeque Petri apostolorum principis trina negatione Christi praedictionem comprobavit, multum per visum illarum praecipue calamitatum quas postea Pilatus perpessus est conflictata, Christi innocentiam et divinitatem agnoscere promeruit. Sed et illuminata exinde iam in Christum crediderat atque in nomine eius baptizata fuerat ac renata nequaquam vel ipso inscio marito.

Not so long ago she had converted to the Jewish Law without her husband's knowledge, and devoted herself greatly to good works. On the night when the Saviour's arrest was celebrated, consecrated by spitting and slapping, and the preaching of Christ was confirmed by the triple denial of Peter, the chief of the Apostles, she deserved to acknowledge the innocence and divinity of Christ, much tormented by the vision of those particular calamities which Pilate later suffered. But also enlightened from that moment [by grace], she now believed in Christ and was baptised in his name and was born again, even though her husband ignored it.

This version of the story is consistent with the cultic outcome of those parts of Christianity that consider Procula a saint and venerate her as a Christian (with a feast day on 27th October). This belief dates back to the 2nd century and is prevalent in the eastern and Greek-speaking regions of the Mediterranean²¹.

It is also worthy of note that Procula enjoyed a close relationship with Matthidia and her family. Indeed, Claudia Procula was herself a noblewoman and held the position of maid to Julia, daughter of Augustus, prior to her marriage to Tiberius.

Procula is described as a woman of keen intelligence and remarkable rectitude (*GsC 4.17: acri foemina ingenio et vitae probitate conspicua*), who is able to inform Clement about his mother, with whom Pilate's wife had been acquainted and on friendly terms.

Nevertheless, even in this instance, the summary procedure of the author of the *GsC* omits certain elements of the narrative that would have been of significant interest to our topic. In contrast, the presbyter of Salona abbreviates this section of the original text and provides a more comprehensive summary of the content pertaining to Jesus and the Gospel account.

In addition to the passage about Claudia Procula, the *GsC* contain at least one other instance where the author's perspective on the Jewish religion is made evident, as well as the vision held by the community that received the text. This is a key point in the text where the narrator describes the tense and persecuted situation of the Jews in Rome at the time, due to the actions of Tiberius and his prefect Sejanus. The emperor had suppressed the Jewish ritual and expelled the Jews from Rome, following an unspecified offence that they had committed against the noble Fulvia, wife of the senator Saturninus (*GsC 4.10*). In this passage, the Jews are defined as «those who have embraced the Law of Moses».

21. Mellinkoff (2006: 341). On the Christianity of Pilate (also stated by Tertullian) and his wife Procula see also Dubois (2005: 245).

This definition is noted by Stanley Jones as being present in the *Periodoi Petrou (Grundschrift)*²².

In both instances examined, a clear and deliberate demarcation exists between Christians and Jews, devoid of any negative sentiment, competitive spirit, or contention. While the *Homilies* condemn the hatred between Jews and Christians, noting the existence of intense disagreements between the two groups²³, the *GsC* do not reflect this contrast. Instead, the two communities are perceived as distinct entities living together in a manner that is respectful and peaceful. Notably, the narrator's attitude towards the Jews in the *GsC* is almost empathetic. This element also contributes to the restoration of the *GsC* as an ancient text intended for a pagan audience. This audience would not have distinguished between Jews and Christians, and would have been negatively influenced by the stories of hatred and disputes that it would have perceived as internal to the same religious group²⁴.

The «women of Clement»

In consideration of the available data, a comparative analysis can be undertaken of the figures of Matthidia and Claudia Procula and their relationships with their husbands.

Matthidia and Procula are two sides of the same coin, exemplifying the same virtues, sensitivity, and piety. As evidenced in the *Recognitiones* and the *Homilies*, Matthidia exhibited qualities in her paganism that would later lead her to convert to Christianity. This passage is a natural fit for Matthidia, as she had already undertaken significant actions during her baptismal preparation without being aware of it. A single sentence from the woman is sufficient to convince Peter²⁵.

Procula, conversely, is already a Christian and exhibits the discernment and composure of an individual at peace with herself. However, this is insufficient to persuade Pilate of his wife's authority. Initially, the governor is reluctant to heed Procula's vision (as recounted in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*). Consequently, upon the arrival of Clement (as detailed in the fragment of the *GsC*), Pilate experiences trepidation, despair, and a sense of vulnerability, ultimately fleeing the city at her counsel. Indeed, Procula displays maternal characteristics towards her husband and Clement. She demonstrates a keen interest in his knowledge of his own family, expressing concern and emotional distress upon hearing the young man's candid responses.

Matthidia, on the other hand, appears to be the principal figure in the original text by Hermagoras of Aquileia (possibly related to the *Grundschrift* of the pseudo-Clementine saga), which is reflected in the *GsC* in a simplified and abridged form. In contrast to the

22. Stanley Jones (2007: 288). Right after, Stanley Jones observes: «The Homilist also alters the story of Clement to have him instructed in Judaism already during his early life in Rome before his encounter with the Christian proclamation» (*ibidem*, 289). In the *GsC*, we read the preaching that Clement hears from Barnabas, which announces the advent of the Son of the Only God. While Barnabas does not identify the Son by name, he proclaims that he is present in the Judean area, offering eternal life to those who follow his teachings and, conversely, condemning to eternal flames those who remain without faith.

23. The question of anti-Judaism, as well as that of Judeo-Christianity in the pseudo-Clementine texts, is too vast to be addressed in this paper. Consequently, I shall restrict the reference to the specific section of the collection of works by Stanley Jones (2012).

24. Despite the notable reworking of the source novel, traces of the original targeted audience of the *Grundschrift*, namely pagans, can be discerned in the *Homilies: De Vos* (2021).

25. Rufin. *Clement.*, VII 34-38; ed. Strecker – Rehm (1994: 213-216); French translation in Cirillo – Schneider (2005: 1875-1879).

portrayal of Claudia Procula, Matthidia is depicted as a more dramatic and moving heroine, and she is treated as an equal by her husband. The man places his trust in his wife and her vision. He attempts to maintain contact with her after her departure, providing financial support and investing resources for years. Despite the advice of various individuals, including the brother-in-law, astrologer, and soothsayers, who indicate that success is unlikely, he sets out alone to find her. In the initial section of the excerpt, Matthidia assumes the role of the narrative's protagonist. She exhibits a similar receptivity to the miraculous signs associated with her pregnancy as Mary did in the New Testament narratives. Furthermore, she makes crucial decisions regarding the child's upbringing and education, including the choice to breastfeed, the decision (not) to attend the temple, and the choice of how to raise the child.

Matthidia and Procula, along with the other «women of Clement» referenced in the fragment (including the first nurse Marcia, who assumes the role of his mother following Matthidia's departure; his paternal aunt Demetriades; and the noble widow Justa, who adopts the twins), illustrate a cultural context and mentality in which women are held in high esteem. This perspective aligns with that of Seneca, who believed that there was no distinction between the sexes in the pursuit of human wisdom²⁶. The philosophy of Seneca, as reflected in its tenets most closely aligned with the tenets of the emerging religion, is evident throughout the text of the *GsC*. In this text, the philosopher of Córdoba is even presented as a character, depicted as a fellow student of the protagonist²⁷. The philosophical and moral content that Seneca shares with Clement along the *GsC* only recedes when Claudia Procula begins the account of Jesus' life. This is an intriguing handover, an element that appears to engage the educated pagan audience in learning about the new religion.

The *GsC* fragment can be viewed as a text of transition, a conduit for the transmission of novel religious content in a multicultural society that is subject to similar pressures within a shared conceptual framework. Indeed, the text appears to serve a dual purpose, simultaneously providing entertainment and offering edification, while firmly establishing its historical context. In essence, it is a text that, from its profound historical roots, could act as an alluring and persuasive force, drawing in and influencing educated Latin readers, potentially leading them to embrace the new religion.

In this context, the «women of Clement» function as a shared model of conduct and a source of inspiration for the audience of the *GsC*, regardless of their cultural background. Such an audience, engaged by a compelling novel replete with literary allusions,

26. Cf. Torre (2015). In her analysis of the *Homilies*, Duncan (2020) identifies a correlation between the portrayal of Matthidia and the conventional definition of a wise individual as espoused in ancient philosophical discourse.

27. *GsC* 3.9: *in philosophicis tum alios insignes tum Attalum stoicum Romae una cum Seneca condiscipulo audivit* (in the field of philosophical studies, he learned in Rome, together with Seneca, <his> fellow student, either from other highly regarded <masters> and from the Stoic Attalus). Once more, Seneca's identity is not aligned with the known tradition, as evidenced in the *Recognitiones*, where we observe Clement referring his thoughts and decisions (and not seeking advice, as in *GsC*) to «a philosopher and family friend» [Rufin. *Clement.*, I 5,5; ed. Strecker – Rehm (1994: 8): *hanc ipsam deliberationem meam retuli ad quondam familiarem meum philosophum, qui mihi Consilium dedit...*]. It also suggests that the author of *GsC* was unaware of the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and Saint Paul, a text which scholars have dated to the 4th century [*status quaestionis* and updates on this apocryphal work in Grappone (2010)]. A more comprehensive inquiry into this subject is offered in the introduction to the forthcoming edition of the *GsC*, Cerno (2025).

written in a correct Christian Latin that evokes the works of Augustine of Hippo and displays stylistic echoes of Cicero, could be that of the noble matrons of late antiquity, who found in the new religion a more profound and nuanced understanding of their role as benefactors of society.

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