THE CHRISTIAN AFTER-LIFE OF SENECA THE YOUNGER
The First Four Hundred Years

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Thesis submitted for the degree of doctor of philosophy
of the Australian National University
Frontispiece
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Death of Seneca* c.1615
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ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW: Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, W. Haase (ed).


C.S.E.L: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.

D.L: Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Phiosophers.


P: ‘St. Paul’ in the fictitious correspondence between ‘St. Paul’ and ‘Seneca’.

Pliny, H.N: Pliny the Elder, Historia naturalis.


Ps. Seneca: Pseudo-Seneca.

S: ‘Seneca’ in the fictitious correspondence between ‘St. Paul’ and ‘Seneca’.

Seneca, N.Q: Seneca, Naturales quaestiones.

S.V.F: Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta, von Arnim (ed).


V. C: Vigiliae Christianae.
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INTRODUCTION

Qui uolet scire omnia, Senecae libros in manum sumat.

This thesis offers a re-examination of the apocryphal correspondence attributed to Seneca and St. Paul. The fourteen letters that make up this correspondence demonstrate Seneca’s high standing amongst Latin-speaking Christians in the fourth century, the probable date of the work. The anonymous author of the correspondence did not invent the reputation that Seneca enjoyed amongst Christians. He did, however, invent the story of the personal relationship between Seneca and St. Paul. The correspondence is used as evidence to support the argument that by the end of the fourth century Seneca was regarded by many Latin-speaking Christians as at least sympathetic to their beliefs. The thesis explores what the author of the letters writes about Seneca and investigates whether his information agrees with that from other sources, including Seneca himself. It explores also what the correspondence reveals about the thought-world of its author and what it tells us about his perception of some problems in his own time.

The study has several objectives. One is to propose reasons that caused early Latin-speaking Christianity to embrace the pagan politician and philosopher Seneca the Younger. His life, career and philosophy are investigated for factors that might have attracted favourable attention from Christians. No such analysis of possible reasons for the belief that Seneca had been sympathetic to Christianity has previously, as far as I know, been attempted. It is this perceived sympathy that opened the way for Seneca’s version of Stoic moral philosophy to enter Latin-speaking Christianity. The evidence is circumstantial rather than definitive. Christian justification for retaining one’s wealth provides an example. We shall return to this topic.

Another of the aims of this study is to demonstrate how Seneca’s works could have provided a path of transmission of Stoicism directly into Latin Christianity. The confident belief on the part

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3 Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, pp. 81, 89. The question of dating is discussed further in Chapter 1. 1.
of many Latin-speaking Christians that Seneca had been in friendly contact with St. Paul led to a positive reception by western Christianity of the Stoic ethics advocated by Seneca. This is not to deny earlier Stoic influences, those apparent in the letters of St. Paul, for example, 4 certainly not to claim that Seneca influenced Paul or that Paul influenced Seneca. Any examples of Stoic influence on St. Paul came from elsewhere, perhaps from his early education. Paul spoke Greek. That in itself suggests some degree of enculturation even if his education had been non legitime. 5 The important point is that Paul’s letters display Stoic influences. Seneca’s Stoicism, then, seemed all the more familiar to Roman Christians. It should come as no surprise if some Latin Christians assumed that Seneca must have acquired and benefited from Christian instruction. It is more surprising that the unknown author of the fictitious correspondence between Stoic philosopher and Christian apostle describes a two-way influence, with an emphasis on Seneca as Paul’s magister.

This is not intended to be a survey of the influence of Stoic philosophy on Christianity, in the tradition of the works of Spanneut, 6 Stead 7 or Osborn. 8 The hope is that it can contribute something to these larger and more comprehensive studies. It may add also to an understanding of the intentions and the background of the author of this interesting work of fiction.

Spanneut denies that there is evidence of direct Stoic influence on early Christian writers. 9 I do not argue against this conclusion. My suggestion is, rather, that some of Seneca’s ethical and moral ideas that are compatible with Christian thought percolated through popular Christian consciousness. This process was aide by those Christian authors writing in Latin who endorsed Seneca. It was accelerated by the fictitious correspondence that established Seneca as a personal friend of St. Paul.

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5 Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, Ep. VII. 10; also below, I. 12, commentary on Ep. VII.
9 Spanneut, Le stoïcisme des Pères de l’Église, pp. 262-264.
This analysis of the letters has uncovered anxieties of the author relating to the state of Christianity in Rome at the time he was writing. One of these concerns is to convince his readers that the division between Judaism and Christianity had long existed. To that end the writer is anxious to portray his Paul as Christian, not Jewish. The author also sets out to demonstrate to contemporary Latin-speaking Romans, especially a reluctant aristocracy, that Christianity was an acceptable religious belief and had been so for three centuries.

It has been necessary to review complex material in order to identify the reasons that lay behind these concerns of the anonymous author. This study explores a wide range of disparate fields, each of which has its own literature. In some cases the amount of literature is so great as to be overwhelming.

The methodology involves a close reading of each of the letters that make up the correspondence in an effort to ascertain what they reveal of their author’s knowledge of Seneca, his career, his philosophy and the of the times in which he lived. Anonymous’ portrayal of Seneca is checked for consistency against other information on Seneca and his philosophy. Seneca’s life and career are examined also in order to uncover factors that could have attracted the favourable attention of Christians. His philosophical works are investigated for statements that either are, or, with finesse, can be interpreted as, consistent with Christian doctrine.

Such an examination would be guess work if it were not for the references to Seneca in the works of various Christian authors. These citations provide examples of aspects of Seneca’s life and thought that attracted the attention of these Christian authors. The writers disclose what they themselves thought of Seneca’s philosophy and sometimes his actions. These works were potentially available to our anonymous author, although we cannot know whether he had read any of them. The most that can be claimed is that his level of education at the time he composed his letters indicates that he could have done so.  

Anonymous did not invent his portrayal of Seneca from nothing. There was already a body of knowledge, supposition and wishful thinking on which he could draw. These included

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10 See p. 22 below.
knowledge of Seneca’s life and career, his philosophical beliefs, his death at the hands of Nero and/or the approval of earlier Christian writers who quoted from or referred to Seneca’s works. The letters establish Seneca as a Christian sympathiser in the mind of their author and also, by extension, in the opinion of those who accepted their authenticity.

Seneca’s life and career were probably not as influential as his death. He could be seen as a victim of Nero, like the Christians who died in the persecution caused by the same emperor. It is possible to read such an interpretation into St. Jerome’s entry on Seneca in his De uiris illustribus.\(^{11}\)

Another question to be investigated is, what does the author of the fictitious correspondence in question tell us about St. Paul and about the status of Christianity in first-century Rome? This information is then checked against that from other sources. If it agrees, the inference can be drawn that Anonymous’ knowledge is sound, at least in these instances. If it differs then a decision must be made. A more nuanced interpretation may see his evidence correspond more closely with that from other sources than appeared on first reading to be the case. The more solidly grounded his information is the greater confidence we can have in any new evidence he supplies. Where his information is doubtful, or even improbable, it can still be of value as demonstrating his own beliefs.

The correspondence adds little to our knowledge of Seneca, or of St. Paul. It can tell us of what the author knew of them. Given the popularity of the correspondence, it also reveals something of what its audience believed and/or what the author was able to convince them was so. The letters thus shine a spotlight on the beliefs of the author and his audience as well as telling us something of the preoccupations of Christians at the end of the fourth century. Since the letters enjoyed a wide circulation it can be assumed that many Christians of the author’s own time shared, or were convinced by, his image of Seneca.

If the essential accuracy of some parts of letters can be established, the names of consuls, the details of the fire, for example, then there can be more confidence in other, more doubtful,

\(^{11}\) See pp. 37-38 below.
claims, such as the condemnation of Jews, as well as Christians, as arsonists and their subsequent persecution along with Christians. The names of the consuls quoted in the letters hint at an official, or at least a written, source of information. Not only is it unlikely that a purely oral tradition would remain accurate over almost four centuries, there was no reason for Christians to remember the names of the consuls except, perhaps, of those actually in office during the persecution. Confidence, however, must be tempered with caution. There are dangers in this approach to be guarded against. That Jews were caught up in the first persecution of Christians can be shown to be plausible, even if definitive evidence is lacking. The centrepiece of the letters, however, the friendship between St. Paul and Seneca, remains improbable, regardless of the accuracy of other information supplied by the author.

It is difficult to tease out historical ‘truth’ from fiction. All fiction, however, is written against its author’s background and that background must intrude to some degree. The letters are also analysed, therefore, for what their author implies about his perception of the problems and anxieties of his own time. As well as claiming Seneca for Christianity the anonymous author of the correspondence seeks to separate St. Paul from his Greek inheritance and his Jewish origins. The thesis considers why, at the end of the fourth century, this separation was thought to be necessary or even desirable. To offer at least a partial answer to this question it sketches the gradual changes in the language of Rome’s Christians from Greek to Latin and the even more gradual division between church and synagogue.

Continuing contact between Jew and Christian was not the only obstacle hindering the formation of a completely Christian empire. More serious was the persistence of traditional pagan observances despite efforts to eradicate all forms of pagan worship.

These are the main contributions of this thesis: the identification of concerns previously unrecognised in these letters and the problems that gave rise to those concerns.

A re-examination of these letters therefore begins the thesis. Their importance is demonstrated by the fact that St. Jerome included Seneca in his *catalogus sanctorum* only because of this
Despite conceding that his *continentissima uita* was admirable, Jerome believed that virtue alone was not enough to justify inclusion. The letters also establish Seneca as a correspondent of St. Paul, an admirer of his ethical, and perhaps also of his religious, beliefs. More surprisingly in the context the author of the correspondence has his St. Paul admire Seneca and even defer to him.

There appears to have been no attempt at an extensive discussion of the letters in English since Barlow’s monograph of 1938. These letters can, however, yield more information than Barlow’s commentary has drawn out and are worth examining again. Another close study of the text from a different perspective is worthwhile if it can tell us something of what its author knew and believed, about Seneca, St. Paul and about the Rome of the dramatic date of his work. The correspondence is also a valuable, if minor, witness to developments in the Roman Empire towards the end of the fourth century. It hints at various contemporary issues: the growing, but as yet incomplete divide between Judaism and Christianity, for example, as well as the continuing observance of traditional pagan rites in Rome.

The correspondence is important in that it preserves an unusual voice, that of a Roman who was not a member of one of the elite orders. Our anonymous author probably held no position of authority within any Christian community (although he might have done). He was an ‘ordinary’ Christian who transmits something of his beliefs and of his knowledge. Unlike some of his contemporaries he preferred to distance the church from the synagogue. He does this by demonstrating that St. Paul had converted from Jew to Christian. His insistence that Paul was no longer a Jew contributes to other evidence that in his time, the end of the fourth century, Christianity had not yet succeeded in distancing itself from Judaism to the extent desired by Christian bishops and Jewish rabbis alike. Anonymous wished also to demonstrate to recalcitrant pagans that Seneca, a pagan philosopher, had been sympathetic to Christian belief. Given the contemporary popularity of his composition, as attested by St. Jerome, it is a reasonable

\[12\] St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

\[13\] See note 2 above.

\[14\] St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.
assumption that his point of view was shared by other ‘ordinary’ Christians of his day, and by some who were not ordinary.

The timing of the appearance of the letters is significant. They were in circulation by the last decade of the fourth century, a time when the Christian members of Rome’s senatorial aristocracy were beginning to equal, then to outnumber the pagans. They reflect some Christian concerns of that period; the desire to demonstrate the respectable antiquity of their religion, for example.

The author depicts Seneca as having been on friendly terms with St. Paul. It is, moreover, a friendship of social equals. The Seneca of the apocryphal letters has a similar relationship with Paul as the Seneca of the *Epistulae morales* has with Lucilius, the addressee of those *epistulae*. Seneca and Lucilius were social equals, with Seneca further advanced in the study and practice of Stoicism than his younger friend and therefore in a position to instruct him. Although the ‘Seneca’ of the apocryphal letters does not propose to instruct ‘Paul’ in Stoic philosophy, he does propose to tutor him in Latin rhetoric. More interesting, there is no clear suggestion in the letters of the need for ‘St. Paul’ to instruct ‘Seneca’ in Christian belief. I shall return to this point.

Paul is portrayed as having abandoned Judaism, so ‘proving’ that the division between church and synagogue occurred very early. He is reported as possessing Roman citizenship at a period when that citizenship was highly prized. Thus the author of the apocryphal correspondence provides Roman Christianity with a respectable pedigree that is almost old enough to be traditional. The author also demonstrates that a senatorial aristocrat in the middle of the first century was prepared to give serious consideration to the study of Christian beliefs, reinforcing the near-respectable antiquity of his religion.

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15 See Chapters 1.1 and 6.4 below.
The correspondence is included in many works dealing with New Testament apocrypha. It appears in both English editions of the second volume of *New Testament Apocrypha*, edited by Schneemelcher, also in the second volume of Trillitzsch, *Seneca im literarischen Urteil de Antike*. There is a general discussion accompanied by a brief commentary on each letter in the first volume of the latter work. Fürst provides a more detailed examination. There are English translations by James and, more recently, by Elliott and Ehrman. All three authors provide a brief introduction to the collection.

It is not surprising that early Christianity absorbed elements of the various philosophies current in the Hellenic world into which it was born and in which it developed. Minucius Felix demonstrates to his audience that in fact Christianity agrees with the teachings of many of the revered philosophers of old, even in some cases where those beliefs appear to be mutually incompatible. In his opinion there were some pagan philosophers who had come within sight of the truth, but failed to grasp all of it. Minucius thus provides an example of the tendency on the part of some Christians to make their religion acceptable to their pagan peers by demonstrating that it was not the radical departure from traditional and conventional philosophical tenets that at first sight it appeared to be.

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19 See note 1 above.


Stoicism was only one of the ancient philosophical systems that influenced Christianity. It was, however, the philosophy to which members of the Roman ruling elite of the early principate were most likely to subscribe, provided they subscribed to any Greek philosophical system. Many of those who did not adhere to Stoic principles were at least inclined to be in sympathy with them.

Philosophy was often looked at askance by aristocratic Romans, who regarded themselves as a practical people, rulers destined to govern not only other Romans, but also those without the law. The study of philosophy, like other arts and crafts, was a more appropriate occupation for others, especially Greeks. This is not to suggest that the Roman upper classes were altogether contemptuous of such pursuits. An educated person was expected to have some acquaintance with all areas of scholarship. A Roman official was a generalist rather than a specialist. Scholarly activity, moreover, was considered a suitable pursuit for those who had retired from an active administrative, military or political career. Pliny the Elder assures his emperor that he conducted his own research in his free time so that it did not interfere with his official duties. His nephew, too, stresses that his uncle’s scholarly work, undertaken while the older man was an active senior imperial official, was done in what to others was ‘down time,’ that is, while travelling, or at times when lesser men were relaxing or even sleeping.

Stoicism provided much of the ethical thought of Latin Christianity either directly or indirectly. The Gospels do not provide a complete guide on how to live an ethical life. Some of Jesus’ precepts as preserved in the Gospels proved to be unpalatable to many Christians and were reinterpreted, sometimes through Stoic and specifically Senecan lenses. Is it possible for a wealthy Christian to remain wealthy, to give one instance. This aspect is considered in more detail below. Philosophical ethics and in the Roman context, especially Stoic ethics, could

26 ‘tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento (hae tibi erant artes), pacisque imponere morem, parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.’
- Vergil, Aeneid VI. 851-853

27 Vergil, Aeneid VI. 849-850. See p. 98 below.
28 Pliny, H. N. praef. 16.
29 Pliny, H. N. praef. 18f.
30 Pliny, Ep. III. v.
provide guidance in matters where the Gospels are silent, how to behave ethically in business dealing, for example.\(^{31}\)

Engberg-Pedersen has examined the earliest Christian writings, the letters of St. Paul, for evidence of Stoic influences.\(^{32}\) Paul’s letters reveal an acquaintance with Stoic philosophy as well as the ability and the desire to employ Stoic methods of reasoning.\(^{33}\) It is not only a modern scholar who finds evidence in the works of the apostle for his knowledge of Stoic thought. The author of the canonical Acts of the Apostles has St. Paul expound Stoic metaphysics in Athens.\(^{34}\) By the time that there were Latin-speaking Christians in any numbers, then, there was already a long-standing perception that St. Paul was familiar with Stoic doctrine and technique. This view supplied common ground between ‘Seneca’ and ‘St. Paul’. According to Seneca’s stated beliefs the lack of an advanced education in the Roman tradition should not affect the ability of a person to become a sapiens.\(^{35}\) Anonymous hints at this Senecan belief in one of his letters.\(^{36}\)

Christian authors, both Greek and Latin, in the early centuries were often sensitive to accusations that their religion attracted only the ignorant and credulous.\(^{37}\) Such criticism led to a tendency on the part of some Christian writers to claim sympathisers, even converts, of high status. This tendency is demonstrated, for example, in the apocryphal gospels.\(^{38}\) One chapter of this thesis, therefore, deals with Seneca’s life and career in an effort to identify those factors that could have attracted Christian approval and even applause sufficient to cause some Latin-speaking Christians to believe that Seneca had been in contact with Christian thought. Seneca was an

\(^{31}\) See p. 102 below.
\(^{33}\) Engberg-Pedersen, ‘Stoicism in the Apostle Paul,’ pp. 71, 73.
\(^{35}\) See Chapter 3. 2 below.
\(^{36}\) Barlow (ed), *Epistolae, Ep. VII*; see also p. 66 below.
\(^{38}\) See p. 55 below.
excellent choice for Latin-speaking Christians to claim as Christian sympathiser, the perfect figure to combat accusations that Christianity appealed only to the poor and ignorant. He had enjoyed both literary and political prestige. He had been a senator as well as an admired literary figure. He had been tutor to the young Nero and continued as adviser after Nero became emperor. He was also a Latin-speaking Roman by upbringing and education, an important point for those seeking to demonstrate that Christianity was an appropriate religion for Romans rather than a foreign superstition to be derided.

Aspects of Seneca’s personality, as revealed by his actions, so far as they can be established, and in his works, are also considered. On a positive note there are his exhortations that slaves are to be regarded as fellow human beings and must be treated as such. He provides demonstrations of this aspect of his teaching in what he tells us of his relationships with his own slaves. Such examples would have gained Christian approval. On the negative side Seneca has been accused of hypocrisy, by his contemporaries, by later Christians and by modern commentators. In modern times the charge has usually been levelled because his praise of poverty does not sit well with the immense wealth he enjoyed. Critics in his own time voiced similar disapproval. Christians in the period covered by this study do not appear to have perceived Seneca’s wealth as problematic. St. Augustine does accuse the philosopher of hypocrisy, but not on the grounds of his wealth. His criticism is due to Seneca’s participation in public rites to honour gods he knew to be false. This is a more serious offence than being wealthy while praising poverty.

The letters have long been recognised as pseudonymous, although they were accepted as genuine for an even longer period of time. In the fourth century the myth of the friendship between Seneca, and St. Paul, self-appointed apostle to the Gentiles, was accepted uncritically and in fact enthusiastically, as is demonstrated by the popularity of this correspondence.

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39 Chapter 3. 6 below.
40 See pp. 101-102 below.
41 See p. 40 below.
42 This is the general scholarly consensus. There is still a minority who continues to believe otherwise. See p. 33 below.
The author of the letters avoids any explanation as to how the two men could have met. The first letter in the collection assumes an established relationship. The letter writer demonstrates some knowledge of Seneca’s life and career. He knows, for example, that Seneca had access to the imperial court. He knows also that Seneca had been Nero’s magister. It is a small imaginative step to believe that Seneca, impressed by St. Paul’s beliefs, would aspire to instruct his former pupil on how to be a Christian prince, as once he had attempted to teach him how to be a Roman princeps.

By the time the fictional correspondence between ‘Seneca’ and ‘St. Paul’ appeared, that is, towards the end of the fourth century, there had been dramatic changes in the status of Christians and of their religion. Once derided as the superstition of the credulous and ignorant, then persecuted as potentially dangerous to the welfare of the empire, Christianity had become the religion of the emperor himself. There were wealthy and even noble adherents. The past was not, however, so far distant. Even in Rome itself Greek as the language of the liturgy was not abolished until the fourth century. Many members of ancient, Rome-based aristocratic families held aloof, continuing to observe traditional religious practices. Rome remained an uncomfortably pagan city in contrast to Constantinople with its Christian emperor and largely Christian court and its lack of pagan temples and festivals.

The author’s goal is to convince his readers that a group of Latin-speaking Christians already existed in Rome during Nero’s reign. Its membership, moreover, included at least two members of the senatorial elite, Seneca himself and his friend and correspondent, Lucilius. Recognising, and admitting, Paul’s educational shortcomings, the creator of the correspondence proposes Seneca as the ideal tutor who will remedy them. Paul is to be assimilated into the ruling elite. The correspondence is a fiction, but something similar did happen in reality. And it occurred in the fourth century, perhaps within the lifetime of the correspondence’s author, although he himself might not have recognised it. St. Ambrose’s letters to his clerical correspondents

43 See Chapters 1. 1 and 6. 1 below.
elevated them to the cultural level of the aristocracy. In this way his colleagues learned how to be leaders and acquired the self-confidence essential to leadership. Ambrose’s background was not as eminent as is sometimes assumed but he did enjoy a marked advantage in social status and all that implied, including an advanced education, compared to his clerical correspondents.

The author of the apocryphal correspondence provides ‘proof’ that Christianity in Rome had a sufficiently long tradition as to be almost respectably ancient. Just as importantly his letters demonstrate that members of the senatorial elite in the first century considered the new religion to be worthy of serious discussion. Even if he were forced to acknowledge that Paul’s education was non legitime, he portrays Seneca as willing to rectify this shortcoming and even to stand as his proxy.

The Latin text of the letters is not readily available, so despite the textual difficulties, they are reproduced in Latin according to the edition of Barlow, who also provides an English translation. It is sometimes difficult to understand the exact meaning of what the author is trying to convey. This could be due to shortcomings on the part of the author, to scribal errors and misunderstandings during the transmission of the text, perhaps both. I have, therefore, included a translation into English based on the work of Barlow, James, Elliott and Ehrman. This translation provides my understanding of what the author is saying.

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47 ibid.
48 ibid.
49 Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. VII*.
50 Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Epp. VII, IX, XIII* and the commentary on these letters below.
52 Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 139-149.
Also included is a commentary on each letter. This commentary has a different emphasis from that of Barlow. It concentrates, although not exclusively on the argument of this thesis.

The first chapter of this thesis establishes Seneca’s supposed Christian credentials according to the author of the correspondence: his friendship with St. Paul, his knowledge of Paul’s writings and his acquaintance with Christians in Rome. Chapter One also explores the question of how many Christians might have been able to read the letters for themselves.

The extent of Christian literacy bears on the question of how widely and how quickly the letters could have become known amongst Christians. The larger the number of literate Christians the more people there would have been who were able to read the letters for themselves and the more readers there would have been to read to their illiterate co-religionists. The extent of Christian literacy thus has a bearing on how quickly the story of St. Paul’s supposed relationship with Seneca would have spread amongst Christian communities. Christian literacy affects also the number of Christians who might have been encouraged by the correspondence to read Seneca’s own works. The larger the number of Christians who came into contact with Seneca’s ideas, the larger the number who could have been influenced by his version of Stoic ethics. If St. Paul himself had held Seneca in such high regard as the correspondence indicates, then there could be no harm in reading his works and there was every possibility of benefiting from them. Lactantius, after all, had stated that Seneca could be read with profit. There is, therefore, a brief survey of modern opinion on the topic of ancient literacy.

Following the discussion of the apocryphal letters the focus of the investigation turns to Seneca’s life, career and philosophy in an effort to identify factors that could have attracted the favourable attention of Christians and caused them to ‘adopt’ Seneca. Since the chapters covering these topics are closely linked the literature for both is reviewed together.

Much scholarly attention has been paid to Seneca in the course of the twentieth century. Motto and Clark have produced a convenient bibliography covering the first eight decades of that

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54 See Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, pp. 139-149, also Trillitzsch, Seneca I, p. 172f, where Barlow’s edition is also followed (Trillitzsch, Seneca im literarischen Urteil der Antike II, p. 379f).
55 Lactantius, Diu. Inst. V. ix. 18
century. The most recent monograph to have come to my attention is that of Veyne, who deals briefly with Seneca’s career and more fully with his Stoic philosophy. Wilson has re-evaluated Seneca’s letters. Other authors, including Lapidge and Hill have examined aspects of Seneca’s philosophy in the context of wider investigations. Lausberg has investigated surviving fragments of Seneca’s works, some of which have been preserved by Christian authors. Trillitzsch assembled and examined the various Senecan texts, or parts of texts, referred to by ancient authors including the fathers of the Latin Church.

A crucial feature in the eyes of the anonymous letter writer was Seneca’s reputation as …censor sophista magister tanti principis etiam omnium… It is not only the correspondence that considers this to be a vital aspect of Seneca’s career. St. Jerome also describes Seneca as Neronis magister. Both Jerome and Anonymous, then, regarded Seneca’s role as teacher to be a crucial aspect of his career. In Anonymous’ case this belief leads him to portray Seneca as Paul’s instructor in Latin rhetoric. Carried away by his enthusiasm he even has his ‘Paul’ declare ‘Seneca’ to be teacher to the world. This comment, in conjunction with his having the philosopher read some Christian work to Nero himself, indicates his belief that Seneca’s philosophy was consistent with Christian beliefs and partly inspired by them.

61 Marion Lausberg, Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten. Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte, Band 7, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970. This work was not noted by Motto and Clark.
63 Barlow (ed.), Epistolarae, Ep. II.
64 St. Jerome, De uiris illustribus XII.
65 Barlow (ed.), Epistolarae, Ep. II.
66 See Barlow (ed.), Epistolarae, Ep. III and p. 37, also Chapter 1.7, 8 and the commentary on Ep. III below.
Seneca was not the only pagan author to have been admired by Latin-speaking Christians. He was not even the most often quoted. That distinction probably belongs to Cicero, who wrote on Stoicism in Latin and could be said to have popularised Greek philosophy to his Roman audience. It is difficult on chronological grounds to suggest that Cicero was a Christian, as he died some forty years before Jesus was born. Christians appear to have made no effort to claim him as an *anima naturaliter Christiana*. Perhaps Cicero’s exposition of Stoic beliefs lacks the imagined appearance of Christian influence displayed in the works of Seneca. Of equal importance is the lack of any possible Christian mentor who might have influenced Cicero in the way that Anonymous believed St. Paul impressed Seneca.

The accident of history that made Seneca a close contemporary of St. Paul was obviously significant. To the letter writer it was inconceivable that St. Paul and Seneca had not met. In his eyes Paul was an important a figure as Seneca in the Roman Empire of the first century. As far as he was concerned it was impossible that two such prominent men would have known nothing of each other.

Seneca was the one Stoic philosopher writing in Latin who could with some credibility be claimed for Christianity. Two other Roman Stoics preferred the use of Greek as the proper language for philosophy. Musonius Rufus, despite being a Roman *eques* apparently taught in Greek. What survives of his thought is preserved in that language. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius also wrote in Greek. The Stoic ex-slave, Epictetus, taught in Greek and what remains of his lectures was written in Greek by his admiring disciple, Arrian. He may, or may not, have known Latin. There was a perception that philosophy could be discussed seriously and thoroughly only in Greek. Latin was just not up to the task. Cicero disputed this assessment. Seneca too objected to the unnecessary use of Greek terminology when there was an adequate Latin term available. He criticised, and avoided, the use of the *Graecum nomen* for asthma, preferring the Latin *suspirium*.

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68 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I. 5-7; II. 5, 35; III. 7, for example.
Both sides of the correspondence are written in Latin. There is no evidence to indicate that St. Paul knew Latin, but also little evidence to suggest that he did not. All of Paul’s genuine letters are in Greek but there are credible reasons to explain this fact, apart from the possibility that Paul had little, if any, Latin. It is possible that the author of the letters had evidence of Paul’s proficiency in Latin, evidence that has since been lost. It is also possible, even probable, that he assumed that the apostle was fluent, and literate, in Latin. If he were trying to distance Paul from his Hellenised past as I suggest, then such an assumption is understandable. This is not to suggest that the author was deliberately seeking to deceive. He believed that St. Paul had been a Roman citizen and therefore could, and should, use Latin. Given his genuine belief in the relationship between apostle and philosopher, Seneca was the obvious teacher to make good the deficiencies of Paul’s irregular education and to tutor him in the rhetorical skills essential in a member of Rome’s ruling elite.

A remarkable feature of the correspondence is its portrayal of the two principals. It might be expected that a Christian writer would give pride of place to the apostle rather than the pagan philosopher. Yet Seneca is to be St. Paul’s magister, as he had once been Nero’s, in order to impart a Latin style appropriate to the noble sentiments that the apostle wishes to impart. It is ‘Seneca’ rather than ‘Paul’ who preaches the Christian message at Nero’s court. Anonymous has his Paul claim that the philosopher had already been touched by the Christians’ God, apparently before the first contact between apostle and philosopher. Like much else in these letters the exact meaning is unclear, but it suggests that in the eyes of our author there was scarcely a need for Seneca to receive the instruction that Lactantius believed was all that was required to convert this pagan philosopher to Christian believer. The correspondence leaves something to the readers’ imagination.

The first letter in Barlow’s edition opens with the account from ‘Seneca’ of a meeting with disciplinarum tuarum comites and a reference to ‘Seneca’ reading some of the letters of St.

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70 See below, p. 49.
71 Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, Ep. XIV.
Paul. Other letters refer to a Christian work written by ‘Seneca.’ The final letter in the collection (Ep. XIV) refers to ‘Paul’s’ satisfaction in “sowing a rich seed in a fertile field,” a comment that could be interpreted as referring to a supposed conversion on ‘Seneca’s’ part but there is no explicit claim as such.

The author of the correspondence allowed his imagination free rein when he had his ‘Seneca’ describe to ‘Paul’ an interview with ‘Nero.’ According to Ep. VIII the emperor was interested in the Christian works Seneca read to him and impressed by what he had to say about Paul. Anonymous is, however, accurate in his depiction of Seneca as an intimate of the imperial court. Seneca’s connections with the Julio-Claudian family extended possibly as far back as Tiberius’ reign and certainly to that of Gaius, when he was part of the inner circle that included the emperor’s sisters, one of whom was Agrippina, Nero’s mother. Our author was aware then, of Seneca’s close links to the imperial family. His description of St. Paul’s supposed links to the court is more imaginative. Paul is introduced to Nero, not in person, but by way of his writings. It is implied that Poppaea, Nero’s wife, is already personally acquainted with Paul. She, however, knows him as a Jew and it is clear that Anonymous believes that she disapproved of Paul’s supposed conversion to Christianity. He is obviously familiar with the story about the presence of Jews and Jewish sympathisers at Nero’s court.

As well as the chronological coincidence of Seneca’s and Paul’s lifetimes and the imagined Christian influences in Seneca’s philosophy there is another factor that attracted Christian interest in Seneca. Seneca was condemned to death by Nero, the emperor responsible for the first persecution of Christians, and, according to Christian tradition, the execution of St. Paul himself. In a brief ‘obituary’ St. Jerome gives the year of Seneca’s death with reference to the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul. There can be little doubt that this juxtaposition influenced the attitude of later ages. The seventeenth century painting by Peter Paul Rubens that portrays the death of

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72 Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, Ep. I.  
73 Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, Épp. II, VII, IX.  
74 See below, p. 86.  
75 St. Jerome, De uiris illustribus XII.
Seneca carries a definite hint of Christian martyrdom. Jerome’s entry on Seneca confirmed contemporary opinion. The creation and reception of the apocryphal correspondence indicates that Seneca had already been ‘adopted’ by the time Jerome wrote his Lives.

St. Jerome’s brief biography does reveal an aspect of Seneca’s life that was worthy of praise, at least in the eyes of Jerome himself. That is the philosopher’s continentissima uita. Although certainly admirable this virtue alone was not sufficient to have Seneca included in Jerome’s Vitae. The supposed correspondence with St. Paul achieved that.

Chapter Three examines Seneca’s philosophical beliefs. No attempt has been made to decide whether Seneca’s Stoicism was orthodox in so far as that term has any meaning in this context, as the subject is of no consequence to the investigation. The important factor to be considered is what Latin-speaking Christians might have made of Seneca’s version of the philosophy of the Stoa. This discussion makes no pretence to being exhaustive. That could hardly be claimed for an entire thesis, much less one chapter. It is an overview only, concentrating on Seneca’s views on topics that could be considered of particular interest to Christians. The popular and officially sanctioned bloodshed of the arena is one example, another is the duty owed by one human being to others, in Christian terms, “Love thy neighbour.”

The inquiry concentrates on Seneca’s letters. Nominally a correspondence with Lucilius, these letters are the closest there is to an exposition of Seneca’s philosophy. It is probable that their author intended that they be so. They were written towards the end of his life when he was aware that that life was coming to a close. Lucilius was a fellow traveller on the road to wisdom although not as advanced as Seneca himself. The behaviour and especially the motivation demanded of him, and others like him who may be considered equally important targets, could then be more rigorous than that to be expected of the addressees of the dialogues.

Seneca appears often to be inconsistent. This trait is particularly evident when the Epistulae are compared with the dialogues. Part of the reason has to do with the difference between the genres. The Epistulae morales form the main statement of Seneca’s ethical beliefs. The Moral Essays

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76 See Frontispiece.
tend to be occasional pieces, as, for example, *De consolatione ad Marciam*. They provide a valuable addition to the letters, but are sometimes confusing in that Seneca appears at times to modify his beliefs to suit either the occasion, the addressee or sometimes both.\textsuperscript{77} Seneca never resolves such inconsistencies. This could be because he did not, for whatever reason, formulate a completely coherent and consistent philosophical system. I would, however, draw attention to a remark by Gould on a major contradiction in Charles Darwin’s view on the subject of ‘progress’ in the evolution of species.\textsuperscript{78} Gould writes that Darwin, as a product of his time and society, could not bring himself to undermine a culture “to which he felt such loyalty, and in which he dwelt with such comfort.”\textsuperscript{79} With due regard to two very different people living in different societies and in different ages, I would like to suggest that perhaps Seneca was unable to rid his ethical philosophy of some of its internal contradictions for similar reasons. To put into general practice his views on slaves, to give one example, would have meant arguing for the abolition of the practice of slavery. No one in Seneca’s world, including Seneca himself, could have imagined a society without slaves. Neither Jews nor Christians suggested abolishing slavery. Adherents of both religions advocated the humane treatment of slaves, just as Seneca also did.

Generally speaking, the plays, although perfused with Stoic philosophy, have little to offer in terms of this project.\textsuperscript{80} The exception is *Octauia*. Its unknown author provides an account, possibly even a first hand account, of some of Seneca’s philosophical musings on exile and of his relationship with Nero.

As its title suggests the work entitled *Naturales quaestiones* deals with natural phenomena. It is written from a Stoic perspective of the natural world with some discussion on the ethical imperatives to be derived from this knowledge. Together with Pliny’s *Naturalis historia* it offers a fascinating glimpse into the ‘scientific’ knowledge of the time. For the purposes of this project the philosophical asides are of greater moment.

\textsuperscript{77} Some of his views on slavery provide an example. See Chapter 3. 6.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}
Chapter Three also contains commentary on certain passages from Seneca that could be interpreted as demonstrating evidence of Christian influence. I have no ambition to emulate the work of scholars like Baur in compiling from the Senecan corpus passages that appear to agree with Christian belief. Such similarities are coincidental. There is no evidence that there was any contact between Seneca and St. Paul, or of Seneca’s acquaintance with any other Christians, despite the scene depicted by our imaginative author of Seneca’s meeting with quidam disciplinarum tuarum comites. It is nevertheless important to choose some examples as case studies. There is something in Seneca’s oeuvre that caused Tertullian to claim him as saepe noster and Lactantius to declare that he would have been a Christian if only he had had a Christian mentor. Later thinkers, like St. Augustine, had the example of their Latin predecessors on which to build. But what had attracted those predecessors themselves to Seneca? There are passages that caused Christians to see this Stoic philosopher as noster, in the sense of a fellow Christian, or at least a sympathiser. This section is speculative as it is difficult to be confident of the details of the precise beliefs of Christians in the early centuries. Care must be exercised that the theological discussions and concerns of later centuries are not read back into the second to fourth centuries. I have therefore used Lactantius’ epitome of his own work as a guide to the Latin Christianity of the late third century. Lactantius possesses the additional advantage of providing a layman’s view of his faith. It was almost certainly an enthusiastic laity who ‘adopted’ Seneca, accepting Tertullian’s noster uncritically and ignoring his qualification of saepe. Despite some reservations, St. Jerome allowed himself to be convinced of Seneca’s pro-Christian attitude by a combination of lay enthusiasm and his own predilection for the ancient pagan writers. St. Augustine also had his own reasons for his willingness to be persuaded by Seneca’s supposed Christian credentials.

I have been conservative in choosing passages from Seneca’s works that appear to show similarities to passages in the letters of St. Paul or the synoptic Gospels. There is no suggestion that Seneca’s philosophy influenced either St. Paul or the writers of the Gospels. The suggestion

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82 Barlow (ed.), Epistolae, Ep. I.
is, rather, that Latin-speaking Christians who had achieved a sufficient level of education and who had read these works, especially those who converted in adulthood, recognised ideas familiar to them from the works of Seneca. There was no separate Christian educational system in the ancient world. Children born to Christian families, and whose families could afford to educate them, studied the same curriculum as their pagan peers. For the more advanced students that included the works of the classical authors, Cicero, Virgil, Terence and Sallust. Seneca was also included, at least at some periods and in some places. The situation for Christian students was the reverse of the pagan experience. More familiar with Christian authors, they would have recognised in Seneca what appeared to be Christian ideas.

The fourth chapter analyses the circumstances in which Seneca is mentioned in the works of Christian authors who wrote in Latin. The chapter traces Senecan citations through the major authors of early Latin Christianity. Several aspects are considered, including whether the reference is to some aspect of Seneca’s personality, to his life or to his philosophy. If the citation is an actual quotation its original context is traced and its use in a Christian context discussed. Also noted is whether the author acknowledges Seneca as the source, thus demonstrating the possibility of first-hand knowledge of at least part of the Senecan corpus. The tone of the reference is examined: is it complimentary or critical? The information contained in this chapter is summarised in Appendix IV.

Chapters Two and Three are speculative: what might Christians have found attractive about Seneca? So attractive in the case of the anonymous author of the fictitious correspondence, that he supplied ‘proof’ that Seneca had been a personal friend of St. Paul, knowledgeable about the apostle’s religious beliefs and even sympathetic towards them. Chapter Four is more firmly grounded. It discusses what various Christian thinkers actually report about Seneca. Sometimes these writers express an opinion on what they record. Even the choice of what they include can be useful. This aspect is of limited value, as it cannot always be established if a particular citation has been taken directly from one of Seneca’s works, from an epitome, or, even more

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85 See pp. 176-177 below.
indirectly, from another author’s quotation. Very little can be made of what was excluded, as it is
difficult to be certain of how closely acquainted any author was with Seneca’s thought.

In the first part of the thesis the concentration is largely on Seneca: what the anonymous author
of the fictitious correspondence believes about Seneca, what Seneca tells us about himself and
his philosophy and what others thought of him. Chapter One demonstrates that by the end of the
fourth century he was regarded as at least sympathetic to Christianity. Chapters Two and Three
examine his life, career and thought in search of possible reasons for his high standing in
Christian opinion. Chapter Four investigates the opinions expressed by various Christian thinkers
during the first four centuries on Seneca.

This re-examination of the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul has yielded
a feature that has previously gone unnoticed. The analysis has uncovered concerns on the part of
the author relating to the state of Christianity in Rome at the time he was writing. One of these
concerns is to convince his readers that the boundary between church and synagogue had been
fixed as early as the first century. To that end the writer is anxious to portray his St. Paul as
Christian, not Jewish. Another goal, arguably the more important one, is to convince Latin-
speaking Romans, including, perhaps especially, a still recalcitrant aristocracy, that Christianity
was an acceptable Roman religio with a pedigree that was almost long enough to be respectably
ancient. Chapters Five and Six, then, describe the author’s historical background in an effort to
explain the reason for his concerns.

Chapter Five describes how the author of the letters seeks to establish the essential ‘Romaness’
of St. Paul and of his religion and analyses possible reasons to explain why he thought this was
necessary. Most obviously he portrays Paul as being on friendly terms with Seneca, Roman
senator and amicus Neronis. Seneca reciprocates Paul’s friendship. He offers to make good the
shortcomings of Paul’s irregular education. Seneca will instruct him in the Latin rhetoric
essential for a member of Rome’s ruling elite orders. Anonymous believes that this is Paul’s
correct social standing.
The author of the pseudopigraphic letters is aware that Paul was Jewish. He has ‘Seneca’ refer to his correspondent’s Jewish origin but makes it clear that he has now abandoned his original faith and converted to Christianity. He was also aware that outsiders in the first century had difficulty differentiating Jew from Christian. I was puzzled by the author’s insistence that Paul had become Christian and was no longer to be regarded as Jewish. From the perspective of the twenty-first century this concern would appear to have been unnecessary at the end of the fourth century. The emperor himself was a Christian and other Christians held positions of power and influence. Under such circumstances it is difficult to understand how Judaism could have been regarded as any sort of threat. Yet it is not only these letters that indicate that Judaism was perceived as presenting a problem. The law codes contain legislation forbidding Jewish missionary activity. Repeated passage of similar laws indicates that there was at least a perception that the legislation failed to have the desired effect. Christian disquiet at the perception of continuing Jewish proselytism was not the only issue. The boundary between Judaism and Christianity was not as clear-cut as some would have preferred it to be. Too many Christians, and Jews, failed to recognise a boundary. The division between Judaism and Christianity was gradual, so gradual in fact that it is impossible to pinpoint any one event or year as the definitive moment. Not only was there a slow differentiation into two distinct faiths its pace was uneven at different periods and in different places. The author of the apocryphal correspondence sought to place the division with St. Paul and thus demonstrate that the separation had occurred as early as the middle of the first century.

Considerable attention has been paid to the complicated historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity in recent decades. Dunn has edited the collected papers from a research symposium devoted to the subject and written on it himself. Lieu, North and Rajak also have edited a collection of papers. Lieu, Simon and Boyarin have all discussed various aspects of the topic.

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The letter writer wishes also to separate Paul from his Hellenised education, an education that, in his eyes, is insufficient for a member of Rome’s upper classes. To that end he has ‘Seneca’ propose to tutor ‘Paul’ in *Latinitas* and especially in the Latin rhetorical skills essential to membership of Rome’s ruling elite. The correspondence is in Latin is probably only because its author himself had little, if any Greek. An important consequence is that both ‘Paul’ and his religion are naturalised. This is one of several points that Anonymous wishes to impress on his audience. First and foremost is the idea that St. Paul enjoyed the friendship of Seneca. This relationship moreover is depicted as a friendship between equals. The author is prepared to acknowledge the deficiencies in Paul’s education. He had not received the rhetorical education essential in a member of Rome’s ruling classes. ‘Seneca’ would remedy this deficiency thus allowing ‘Paul’ to assume what Anonymous believed was his proper place in Roman society.

The letters reveal something of their author’s historical knowledge of Neronian Rome. The author knows of Seneca’s position as tutor to Nero and of his friendship with Lucilius. He knows about Poppaea’s supposed sympathy towards Judaism. He has detailed information about the fire that devastated Rome. He is aware, not surprisingly, that Christians were condemned as arsonists. Given Anonymous’ knowledge of at least some parts of first century Roman history it would not be surprising if he were aware of the Hellenising influence on early Christianity as well as the low status of the majority of its first adherents. His aim is to demonstrate that there were early Roman influences as well. ‘Seneca’ supplies early Latin-speaking Christianity with *Latinitas, Romanitas* and *nobilitas*. Thanks to Seneca, Paul is to acquire all three virtues.

The focus is on the Christians of the imperial capital. Lampe has written on the Christians of Rome during the first two centuries. Surviving evidence indicates that, regardless of their

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ethnic origin the majority of earliest Christ believers in Rome were Greek-speaking. St. Paul’s letter to the Romans provides a contemporary account of the status of Christianity in Rome in the mid-first century or a little later. It is not a first-hand account since Paul was writing before he reached Rome so that the information he provides is what he had learned from previous contact with at least some of the people whose names he mentions.

The Christian face of Rome continued to be Greek for generations. When this did finally change it was probably due as much, if not more, to the influence of Latin-speaking Christian immigrants from North Africa as it was to the conversion of numbers of Latin-speaking inhabitants of Rome. This change in language is traced through various texts, including inscriptions. The works of Noy and Rutgers are invaluable for their discussion of the inscripational evidence. I have also used the Muratorian Fragment and the Didascalia Apostolorum to assist in dating the replacement of Greek by Latin as the language of western Christianity.

Another enduring aspect of Roman Christianity was its low status membership. This is not to imply that believers were necessarily slave, nor the poorest of the poor. On the contrary, Christian groups appear quite early to have attracted well-to-do members, some even wealthy, sometimes exslave, but almost exclusively non-elite. Hermas provides an example. Osiek’s work on The Shepherd of Hermas provides insights into the concerns of one Christian in Rome the second century. Given the popularity of this work it is safe to assume that at least some of the problems identified by Hermas also troubled his readers.

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92 See p. 253f below.
Some, perhaps many, possibly most Latin-speaking Christians in the west came increasingly to prefer to distance themselves from the Jewish and Greek roots of Christianity. From the time of first contact with Hellenism there had been concerns amongst many Romans about its influence on their culture. Cato the Elder’s hostility was extreme but not unique. Even men who had enjoyed a Hellenised education, like Cicero and Seneca, expressed reservations. Much of the senatorial opposition to Nero stemmed from his passion for all things Greek. Upper-class Romans were especially outraged by the young Emperor’s ambition to perform in public. Rome was prepared to adopt many aspects of Greek culture, but preferred to naturalise them. Some features could not be naturalised. These included the appearance of Roman aristocrats performing on the public stage.

Despite the fact that the dramatic date of his letters is far in his past, the author of the correspondence could not entirely escape contemporary influences. His concerns about continuing Jewish influences on Christianity are discussed in Chapter Five. The perception that too many Christians continued to be attracted by aspects of Judaism motivated him to have ‘Seneca’ make it clear that Paul had abandoned Judaism.

Concern about continuing Jewish influence was not the only cause for disquiet amongst the Christians of Rome, and indeed of the empire as a whole, in the fourth century. Despite some eighty years of rule by Christian emperors (except for the brief reign of Julian) paganism survived and in Rome at least the ancient pagan rites and traditions continued to flourish. A still powerful aristocracy ruled Rome in the absence of the reigning emperors who had removed the imperial court to cities more conveniently located to the restive frontiers of the empire. Members of Rome’s senatorial families were wealthy and powerful, enjoying the prestige conferred by antiquity. By the end of the fourth century they were still largely pagan. Even Christian aristocrats could be swayed by the weight of age-old pagan traditions. As well as Romanising St. Paul and Christianity, therefore, the author of the pseudepigraphic correspondence sets out to ‘Christianise’ Seneca. This will not only demonstrate that there were members of the senatorial

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96 Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 14f.
97 Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. V.*
98 See pp. 234-235 below.
nobility in the first century who had been Christians, it also provides Christianity in Rome with a pedigree almost long enough to be respectably ancient, even traditional. Members of the governing classes of Rome itself were slow to convert, even after the empire became officially Christian. Then, when members of senatorial families did at last embrace Christianity, there remained a lingering suspicion in some minds that their conversion was due as much to ambition as to conviction. A comparatively early convert from an aristocratic family was Faltonia Betitia Proba. Her epic poem on Christian history allows a glimpse into some of her Christian beliefs. 

Chapter Six sketches the history of Rome in the fourth century, from pagan city with a Christian population that a pagan usurper felt necessary to appease, to a theoretically Christian city with an influential Christian bishop, whose pagan population was yet large enough, or powerful enough, for a Christian usurper to seek their support. The author of the pseudonymous correspondence presents his ‘Seneca’ as Christian sympathiser in a bid to convince recalcitrant pagan aristocrats that Christianity was a traditional Roman belief that had attracted senatorial interest as early as the first century.

Curran has described the changes in Rome during the fourth century, Matthews has dealt with relations between western aristocrats and the imperial court during the second half of the fourth century and the first decades of the fifth. Salzman has written on the conversion of the aristocracy. The brief reign of the Emperor Julian is discussed by Bowersock and Browning. Croke and Harries have conveniently collected documents relating to religious disputes in fourth-century Rome. Bloch’s article on the so-called last pagan revival in the west

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is still valuable, although I disagree with its concept of Eugenius’ usurpation as paganism’s last stand.¹⁰⁶

Many factors lie behind a decision to change religious allegiance. One factor is that some aspects of the new religion appear comfortingly familiar. In the case of senatorial families this could include an ethical system that seemed comfortably and familiarly Stoic in its attitude to wealth, to take one possible example. It cannot be claimed that Seneca’s rationalisation was adopted; the evidence is lacking. It can, however, be noted that Christian justification is very similar.

Christian leaders were eager to attract aristocrats and aspired to meet their needs, such as the provision of a prestigious career path and the opportunity to display their wealth in a suitably Christian manner. The possession of wealth presented a problem for Christians, a problem still being addressed by St. Augustine. The Gospels are critical of the possession of wealth, recommending that wealthy people who wished to gain eternal life should dispose of all their worldly goods and donate the money to the poor.¹⁰⁷ Hermas, in the mid-second century,¹⁰⁸ occupies an intermediate position, in both time and attitude, between the Gospels and Proba, the wealthy and aristocratic lady of the mid-fourth century,¹⁰⁹ who makes no apologies for her wealth. She provides an interpretation of the story of the rich young man whom Jesus advises to give away his wealth that differs from the one generally accepted. Her exposition echoes that of Seneca in its claim that Jesus meant that the young man should learn to treat his money with contempt, not that he should rid himself of it. From the evidence available it cannot be claimed that she was following Seneca. It is possible, however, that she had read Seneca and had found his ideas on wealth to be congenial. St. Augustine assumed that an educated person would be familiar with Seneca’s works.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ See below, Chapter 5. 5.
¹⁰⁹ See below, pp. 244-245.
¹¹⁰ See Chapter 4. 8.
St. Ambrose and St. Augustine rationalise the possession of wealth in terms that resemble Seneca’s justification of his own wealth. This is not compelling evidence that they copied his defence. But those converts with sophisticated literary skills would recognise the similarities and be comfortable with them. Those with less sophisticated skills but who were nevertheless literate, like the anonymous author of the Pauline/Senecan correspondence, might also recognise the similarities.

As more aristocrats converted, bringing with them more of their own traditions, including Stoic ethics, the process became mutually reinforcing and Christianity became increasingly attractive to their peers. Once a critical proportion of high status families were Christian the old religion became increasingly less viable and so less appealing. There would be fewer candidates eligible for various pagan priesthoods. Vacant priesthoods led in turn to difficulties in performing pagan ceremonies.

By the end of the fourth century the number of senatorial aristocrats was beginning to equal, then to outnumber, the number of pagan members of such families. This is also the period that saw the circulation of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul. Some motives that have been suggested to explain its composition are connected with the reluctance of many old Roman aristocratic families to abandon paganism. The very existence of St. Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei* is testament to the continuing authority wielded by pagans in a Christian Empire. If the remnants of paganism were as few and as powerless as, for example, Jerome would have us believe, then Augustine would not have felt the necessity of producing a defence of Christianity against pagan attack after the sack of Rome, let alone encouraging Orosius to write another. That was not Augustine’s only motive in writing *De ciuitate Dei*, although it is a motive even if perhaps a minor one. Orosius’ *Historia aduersum paganos* is an apologetic work designed to demonstrate that the disasters suffered by the empire of his own day were nothing new and not due to the contemporary neglect of the gods. Similar calamities had befallen Rome in the past.

There is no intention in this work to suggest that Seneca was sympathetic towards Christianity, let alone that he was a convert, or that he met St. Paul or that he had even heard of him. Seneca knew nothing about Christian beliefs. It is possible that he did learn of the existence of
Christianity towards the end of his life because of Nero’s persecutions in the aftermath of the fire. If so, there is no trace of such knowledge in his surviving works, or in the works that were available to St. Augustine.

This correspondence under review is not the only work that has been falsely attributed to Seneca. The play Octauia has been transmitted under his name despite the fact that is unlikely that he wrote it. The unknown author of the play provides us with a pen portrait of Seneca that is probably contemporary. This tragedy could have supplied later Christians with a sympathetic image of Seneca.

There are as well two collections of sententiae that have been handed down under Seneca’s name. These are Monita and Liber de moribus. These compilations looked promising initially as they appeared to consist of a mixture of Christian precept and Senecan sententiae, all attributed to Seneca. Closer study, however, revealed so many uncertainties and complications that neither Liber de moribus nor Monita has proved to be of great value for the purposes of this investigation. There appears to be no English translation or commentary on either work. It is possible that they could repay closer study in their own right. Both are referred to again in Chapter Four.

I would also like to clarify my use of the word ‘pagan.’ In this thesis ‘pagan’ is used in a non-pejorative sense to indicate people who were neither Christian nor Jew. It is used as a near-synonym for ‘polytheist’ with the advantage that it can include those whose beliefs were edging towards monotheism. There is no intention to suggest that ‘paganism’ was a coherent religious system. The word is a convenient shorthand term to cover both polytheists and those who saw no challenge to their form of monotheism in participating in the various public rituals that most Romans, whether speakers of Latin or of Greek, saw as essential for the continuing success of their city and for the empire as a whole.

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111 See pp. 89-90 below.
112 I have consulted two editions of De moribus, that of Otto Friedrich (ed), ‘Pseudo - Seneca, De moribus,’ in Otto Friedrich (ed), Publilii Syri Mimi Sententiae, pp. 87-91, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964, with its invaluable notes on pp. 261-273, and that of E. Woelfflin, ‘(Pseudo-) Seneca, Liber de moribus.’ The Friedrich edition was first published in 1880. That of Woelfflin dates from 1869. I have been unable to obtain a copy of this work and I have therefore used the text as reproduced in Trillitzsch, Seneca II, Q19. 2, pp. 399-405.
Several appendices are attached to this work. Most are cited in the appropriate chapters. The exceptions are Appendix IV that summarises the information contained in Chapter Four and Appendix A that discusses Christian and pagan attitudes to suicide.

Suicide is now unacceptable to Christianity, and has been for so long that it is easy to conclude that it has always been so. This subject would appear to be an unbridgeable gulf between Christian teaching and the beliefs and practices of the Stoa in general and Seneca in particular. Seneca’s views on suicide should disqualify him as an object of Christian admiration. Research on this thesis, however, has uncovered evidence that demonstrates that, for some four hundred years, suicide was an acceptable option to some Christians, at least under some circumstances. With important qualifications, Christians viewed the topic of suicide in a similar light to their non-Christian neighbours. It was only with St. Augustine that the full implications of Christian morality for the subject became clear.