

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

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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).

Aulus Gellius, *N. A*: *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*.

Barlow, *Epistolae*: Barlow, Claude W. (ed.) *Epistolae Senecae ad Paulum et Pauli ad Senecam <quae uocantur>*.

Colish, *The Stoic Tradition*, I: Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Vol. I. *Stoicism in Classical Latin Literature*.

Colish, *The Stoic Tradition*, II: Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Vol. II. *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*.

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

D.L: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.

JECS: *Journal of Early Christian Studies*.

OCD: *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, third edition.

OLD: *Oxford Latin Dictionary*.

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

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

P.S.M.S: *Publilius Syri Mimi Sententiae*, Otto Friedrich (ed).

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).

Trillitzsch, *Seneca I*: Winfried Trillitzsch, *Seneca im Literarischen Urteil der Antike. Darstellung und Sammlung der Zeugnisse*, Vol. I, *Darstellung*.

Trillitzsch, *Seneca II*: Winfried Trillitzsch, *Seneca im Literarischen Urteil der Antike. Darstellung und Sammlung der Zeugnisse*, Volume II, *Quellensammlung (Testimonien)*.

V. C: *Vigiliae Christianae*.

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oil on canvas 182.0 x 121.0 cm Collection: Museo del Prado, Madrid.

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INTRODUCTION

Qui uolet scire omnia, Senecae libros in manum sumat.¹

This thesis offers a re-examination of the apocryphal correspondence attributed to Seneca and St. Paul.² 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.³ 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

¹ Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* V. 9. 18 (Winfried Trillitzsch, *Seneca im literarischen Urteil der Antike. Darstellung und Sammlung der Zeugnisse*, Vol. II, *Quellensammlung [Testimonien]*, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1971, Q 11. 5, pp. 366-367).

² Claude W. Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae Senecae ad Paulum et Pauli ad Senecam <quae uocantur>*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, vol. X, Horn: Ferdinand Berger, 1938.

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 Stead⁷ 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 aided 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.

⁴ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, pp. 45-46.

⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. VII. 10; also below, I. 12, commentary on Ep. VII.

⁶ Michel Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme des Pères de l'Église: de Clément de Rome à Clément d'Alexandrie*, nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969, *Patristica Sorbonensia* 1, 1957.

⁷ Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁸ Eric Osborn, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

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.¹⁰

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

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

correspondence.¹² 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 1938.¹³ 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,¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ They reflect some Christian concerns of that period; the desire to demonstrate the respectable antiquity of their religion, for example.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.

¹⁵ See Chapters 1.1 and 6. 4 below.

¹⁶ Michele Renee Salzman, *On Roman Time. The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, p. 198.

¹⁷ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. XII*. There is dispute on how, or even if, Paul had acquired Roman citizenship. See John Clayton Lentz, *Luke’s Portrait of Paul*, Society for New Testament Studies, monograph series, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 48f, 59f.

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,¹⁸ also in the second volume of Trillitzsch, *Seneca im literarischen Urteil de Antike*.¹⁹ There is a general discussion accompanied by a brief commentary on each letter in the first volume of the latter work.²⁰ Fürst provides a more detailed examination.²¹ There are English translations by James²² and, more recently, by Elliott²³ and Ehrman.²⁴ 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,²⁵ 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.

¹⁸ W. Schneemelcher (ed), *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. II, *Writings Relating to the Apostles Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, London: SCM Press, 1975; W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. II, *Writings Relating to the Apostles, Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, revised edition of the collection initiated by Edgar Henneke, English translation edited by R. McL. Wilson, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992.

¹⁹ See note 1 above.

²⁰ Winfried Trillitzsch, *Seneca im literarischen Urteil der Antike. Darstellung und Sammlung der Zeugnisse*, vol. I, *Darstellung*, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1971.

²¹ Alfons Fürst, 'Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität im apokryphen Briefwechsel zwischen Seneca und Paulus,' *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 41 (1998): 77-117.

²² M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament. The Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses with Other Narratives and Fragments*, Oxford, 1975, pp. 480-484.

²³ J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 549-553.

²⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 160-164.

²⁵ Minucius Felix, *Octavius* XIX; G. W. Clarke, *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*, *Ancient Christian Writers, the Works of the Fathers in Translation*, no. 39, New York: Newman Press, 1974, notes 230-261.

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.²⁶ The study of philosophy, like other arts and crafts, was a more appropriate occupation for others, especially Greeks.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰

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 erunt 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.

³² Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicism in the Apostle Paul,' in Steven K. Strange and Jack Zupro (edd), *Stoicism. Traditions and Transformations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 52-75.

³³ Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicism in the Apostle Paul,' pp. 71, 73.

³⁴ Acts 17. 24-29. See also T. D. Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial,' article III in *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1984, p. 418.

³⁵ See Chapter 3. 2 below.

³⁶ Barlow (ed), *Epistolae, Ep.* VII; see also p. 66 below.

³⁷ Minucius Felix, *Octavius* VIII. 4; Clarke (trans), *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*, p. 18f; Origen, *Contra Celsum* I. 27; Henry Chadwick (ed. and trans), *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. xiii; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983, p. 35).

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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ This is a more serious offence than being wealthy while praising poverty.

The letters have long been recognised as pseudonymous,⁴² 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.

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,⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁴ Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten. Untersuchungen zur Sozialgeschichte*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neue Testament 2, Reihe 18, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), second edition, 1989, p. 117.

⁴⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. I*. See also pp. 58-59 below.

elevated them to the cultural level of the aristocracy.⁴⁶ In this way his colleagues learned how to be leaders and acquired the self-confidence essential to leadership.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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*,⁴⁹ he portrays Seneca as willing to rectify this shortcoming and even to stand as his proxy.⁵⁰

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,⁵¹ who also provides an English translation.⁵² 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.⁵³ This translation provides my understanding of what the author is saying.

⁴⁶ Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 277.

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.

⁵¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 123-138; Trillitzsch, *Seneca im literarischen Urteil der Antike* I, p.172 with note 17.

⁵² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 139-149.

⁵³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 139-149; James (trans.), *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 480-484; Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 549-553; Ehrman (ed.), *Lost Scriptures*, pp. 160-164.

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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵ 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

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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ Wilson has re-evaluated Seneca's letters.⁵⁸ Other authors, including Lapidge⁵⁹ and Hill⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ Trillitzsch assembled and examined the various Senecan texts, or parts of texts, referred to by ancient authors including the fathers of the Latin Church.⁶²

A crucial feature in the eyes of the anonymous letter writer was Seneca's reputation as ...*ensor sophista magister tanti principis etiam omnium*...⁶³ 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*.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ This comment, in conjunction with his having the philosopher read some Christian work to Nero himself,⁶⁶ indicates his belief that Seneca's philosophy was consistent with Christian beliefs and partly inspired by them.

⁵⁶ Anna Lydia Motto and John R. Clark, *Seneca. A Critical Bibliography. 1900-1980. Scholarship on His Life, Thought, Prose and Influence*, Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1989.

⁵⁷ Paul Veyne, *Seneca. The Life of a Stoic*, David Sullivan (trans), London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

⁵⁸ Marcus Wilson, 'Seneca's Epistles Reclassified,' in S. J. Harrison (ed), *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics. Scholarship, Theory, and Classical Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁵⁹ Michael Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Latin Literature. First to Third Centuries A. D.' in W. Haase (ed), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II* 36. 3, pp. 1379-1429, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989.

⁶⁰ Timothy Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature*, New York: Routledge, 2004.

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.

⁶² Motto and Clark, *Seneca. A Critical Bibliography*, no. 1751, p. 354.

⁶³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. II*.

⁶⁴ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus XII*.

⁶⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. II*.

⁶⁶ See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, 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 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 *equus* 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.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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*.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Long believes that "he must have known Latin ..." (A. A. Long, *Epictetus. A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*, Oxford: 2002, p. 13).

⁶⁸ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I. 5-7; II. 5, 35; III. 7, for example.

⁶⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* LIV. 1.

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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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.

⁷⁰ See below, p. 49.

⁷¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. XIV.

Paul.⁷² Other letters refer to a Christian work written by ‘Seneca.’⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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

⁷² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* I.

⁷³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Epp.* II, VII, IX.

⁷⁴ See below, p. 86.

⁷⁵ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

Seneca carries a definite hint of Christian martyrdom.⁷⁶ 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*

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.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.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."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.⁸⁰ The exception is *Octavia*. 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.

⁷⁷ Some of his views on slavery provide an example. See Chapter 3. 6.

⁷⁸ Stephen Jay Gould, *Life's Grandeur. The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1996, p. 141.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Miriam T. Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics*, Oxford, 1976, p. 24, note 2.

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.⁸¹ 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*.⁸² 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.⁸³ 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

⁸¹ Baur, 'Seneca und Paulus, das Verhältnis des Stoicismus zum Christentum nach dem Schriften Senecas,' *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* I (1858): 11-246; 441-470.

⁸² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. I.

⁸³ E. H. Blakeney (ed. and trans.), *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, London: SPCK, 1950, p. xii.

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.⁸⁴ Seneca was also included, at least at some periods and in some places.⁸⁵ 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

⁸⁴ H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, G. Lamb (trans), London: Sheed and Ward, 1977, p. 278.

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 pseudepigraphic 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.⁸⁶ Lieu, North and Rajak also have edited a collection of papers.⁸⁷ Lieu,⁸⁸ Simon⁸⁹ and Boyarin⁹⁰ have all discussed various aspects of the topic.

⁸⁶ James D. G. Dunn (ed), *Jews and Christians. The Parting of the Ways A. D. 70 to 135*, the Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism, (Durham, September, 1989), *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 66, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992; James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1991.

⁸⁷ Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak (edd), *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*. London and New York: Routledge. 1992.

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.⁹¹ Surviving evidence indicates that, regardless of their

⁸⁸ Judith Lieu, *Image and Reality. The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996; *Neither Jew nor Greek. Constructing Early Christianity*, London and New York: T & T Clark, 2002.

⁸⁹ Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel. A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, H. McKeating (trans.), Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

⁹⁰ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

⁹¹ Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*², 'The Roman Christians of Romans 16,' in Karl P. Donfried (ed), *The Romans Debate*, revised and expanded edition, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991, pp. 216-230, *From Paul to Valentinus. Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, Michael Steinhauser (trans), Marshall D. Johnson (ed), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

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.⁹² 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 inscriptional evidence.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴

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 ex-slave, 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.⁹⁵ 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.

⁹² See p. 253f below.

⁹³ David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome. Citizens and Strangers*, London: Duckworth, 2000; Leonard Victor Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome. In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, Leuven: Peeters, 2000.

⁹⁴ Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, Oxford, 1992; R. Hugh Connolly (ed), *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the Syriac version translated and accompanied by the Verona Latin fragments, with an introduction and notes by R. Hugh Connolly, Oxford, 1929, reprinted 1969.

⁹⁵ Carolyn Osiek, *Rich and Poor in the Shepherd of Hermas. An Exegetical-Social Investigation*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series no. 15, Washington D. C, The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983; 'The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome,' in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (edd), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 151-172; *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia – a critical and historical commentary on the Bible, Helmut Koester (ed), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸ 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

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.⁹⁹

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,¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ Salzman has written on the conversion of the aristocracy.¹⁰² The brief reign of the Emperor Julian is discussed by Bowersock¹⁰³ and Browning.¹⁰⁴ Croke and Harries have conveniently collected documents relating to religious disputes in fourth-century Rome.¹⁰⁵ Bloch’s article on the so-called last pagan revival in the west

⁹⁹ Elizabeth A. Clark and Diane F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross. The Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba*, American Academy of Religion, Texts and Translations Series, no. 5, Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981.

¹⁰⁰ John R. Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital. Rome in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 2000.

¹⁰¹ John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364-425*, Oxford, 1975.

¹⁰² Michele Renee Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy. Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2002.

¹⁰³ G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, London: Duckworth, 1978.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975.

¹⁰⁵ Brian Croke and Jill Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome. A Documentary Study*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1982.

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

¹⁰⁶ Herbert Bloch, 'A New Document of the Last Pagan Revival in the West,' *Harvard Theological Review* XXXVIII. 4 (October, 1945): 199-244. See also p. 231 below.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 19. 16-24; Mark 10. 17-25; Luke 18. 18-25.

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 priesthods. Vacant priesthods 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 *Octavia* has been transmitted under his name despite the fact that it is unlikely that he wrote it.¹¹¹ 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*.¹¹² 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.

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), *Publilius 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.

CHAPTER ONE

The Apocryphal Correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul

*Hic ante biennium quam Petrus et Paulus martyrio coronarentur, a Nerone interfectus est.*¹

This chapter argues that the correspondence supposedly exchanged between Seneca and St. Paul established Seneca among the Christians who read it or listened to it being read as having been sympathetic towards Christianity and perhaps more than sympathetic. The author's picture of Seneca is based on some knowledge of his life and career, especially his status as *magister* to Nero and his reputation as a spiritual guide and mentor. The appearance of Lucilius in the first letter indicates the possibility that the writer was acquainted with Seneca's *Epistulae morales* addressed to Lucilius.

It is now well established that this correspondence is pseudonymous.² Some scholars have been reluctant to abandon what they perceive as the attractive idea of a personal connection between the Stoic politician and the early leader of the Christians. Lipsius and his circle of Christian neo-Stoics in the seventeenth century formed one such group. There are twentieth century commentators also who adhere to the belief that, although the fourteen extant letters are spurious, there did once exist a genuine correspondence that has not survived.³ This persistent desire to retain the image of Seneca as Christian sympathiser, or even secret convert, is a testament to the perception of Christian inspiration in much of his thought.

There is no reason to suppose that the authenticity of the letters was in doubt at the end of the fourth century and into the fifth. Nor is it necessarily the case that the author's motive was mischievous. It is possible that he was convinced that there had been a connection between

¹ St. Jerome, *Liber de uiris illustribus* XII.

² For a brief discussion on this point, see J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, Supplements to Nouum Testamentum, vol. IV, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961. p. 13, with notes 1 and 2.

³ See Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, pp. 12-13. See also Paul Berry, *St. Paul and Seneca. Correspondence Between Paul and Seneca, A.D. 61-65*, Mellen Press, 1999. I have not seen this book, but have read the review by Lew Rockwell. Berry apparently argues for the authenticity of the correspondence as we have it.

philosopher and apostle and that all that was required was evidence that he would provide.⁴ He was doing no more than fill a perceived gap in the historical record.

The author of this correspondence believed that St. Paul and Seneca were on friendly, not to say intimate, terms. Its popularity in the fourth century indicates that many other Christians accepted this view. The letters display no compelling evidence that the author was familiar with Seneca's work. He does, however, know something of Seneca's life and career. He has his St. Paul hailing 'Seneca' as *censor* and *sophista*,⁵ demonstrating that he knows of his reputation as moralist and philosopher. He is also aware that Seneca had been *magister* to Nero.

In the same letter there is also a suggestion that its author knew of Seneca's desire to be regarded as a spiritual adviser to many others as well: *magister ... etiam omnium*. Seneca had advised Lucilius

*cogita, quantum nobis exempla bona prosint; scies magnorum uirorum non minus praesentiam esse utilem quam memoriam.*⁶

Despite his protestations that he was no *sapiens* Seneca nevertheless saw himself as a suitable role model. When he was denied permission to alter his will so that he could display material gratitude to those friends who were with him at the end, Seneca offered them as his final legacy, *imago uitae suae*.⁷

It is not clear whether the writer of these letters derived his knowledge of Seneca directly from the philosopher's own works, or whether he based his portrayal on indirect information, from historians like Tacitus for example. Whatever the source of his information, his fictional Seneca displays occasional flashes of the historical Seneca. Whether fictional or historical, it is clear that his image of Seneca was read, and apparently accepted, by numerous Christians. A feature of Seneca's career that is not mentioned is his position of authority. That this was known to

⁴ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Hammondsworth: Viking, 1986, pp. 557-558.

⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. II.

⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* CII. 30.

⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62.

Christians of the period is attested by St. Jerome.⁸ His influence is, however, implied by his role as *magister Neronis* and by the depiction of his ready access to the emperor and his court.

I shall deal first with the question of when the letters were composed and released into the Christian community.

1. 1 Dating the Correspondence

Barlow dates the correspondence to some time between 325, when Lactantius' *Institutiones Diuinae* appeared, and 392, when Jerome's reference to the correspondence was published. This is the first surviving report of the letters.⁹

Lactantius was enthusiastically in favour of Seneca's ethical views and goes so far as to claim that Seneca could have been Christian, if only someone had shown him the way.¹⁰ Since he makes no mention of the correspondence, it is reasonable to infer that the letters were unknown to him. It is difficult to believe that Lactantius would have passed over in silence this evidence of contact between St. Paul and Seneca. St. Paul was the person to show Seneca the path to Christianity. It also seems likely that the correspondence had not yet begun to circulate.¹¹ If Christians were still a small minority in the empire, perhaps 10%,¹² the number of literate Christians able to read the letters would have been even smaller, say 20% of Christian men.¹³ It is difficult to believe that it would have taken very long for Christian writings of any sort to be

⁸ St. Jerome, *Liber de uiris illustribus* XII.

⁹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 81.

¹⁰ *potuit esse uerus Dei cultor, si quis illi monstrasset* (Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* VI. xxiv). See below Chapter 4. 5.

¹¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 4–5; Marion Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 27, with notes 41 and 42. Bickel, on the other hand, prefers the third century A.D. (quoted by A. Kurfess 'The Apocryphal Correspondence between Seneca and Paul,' Geogr Ogge [trans.], in W. Schneemelcher [ed.], *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1975, p. 133 and note 1). Hahneman also accepts a third century, rather than a fourth century, date (Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, Oxford, 1992, p. 110). See also Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 181, note 48.

¹² Keith Hopkins, 'Christian Number and its Implications,' *JRS* 6. 2 (1998), p. 192, with note 11.

¹³ Hopkins, 'Christian Number and its Implications,' p. 212; see also Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 5 and 10, Carolyn Osiek, 'The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome,' in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (edd.) *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, p. 159, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

known to such a small number of people, even given the geographic distances that could have been involved.

Christianity was largely an urban phenomenon.¹⁴ Information spread more quickly and easily amongst groups concentrated in cities and towns than it could have done throughout rural areas. There was still comparatively little Christian writing in Latin, as opposed to the literature inherited from Judaism, and even Christian works in Greek, because there were still few Latin-speaking Christians with sufficiently sophisticated literary skills to write it.¹⁵ Other evidence implies that the correspondence was written about 364 at the earliest.¹⁶ This leaves a gap of almost thirty years before the reference by St. Jerome. Barlow prefers a date close to 392 to account for the impression that Jerome had not seen the letters for himself by the time he wrote Seneca's entry in *De uiris illustribus*.¹⁷

There is nothing to indicate who was responsible for introducing the correspondence into the Christian community, whether the author himself or some other person. If Barlow's dating is accepted there was little time between the composition of the correspondence and its circulation, only months perhaps, but years rather than decades. It is possible that the letters were circulated without their author's permission, although he would have become aware of their appearance, provided he was still living.

The letters written under the name of Paul contain virtually nothing of Christian doctrine. This could have worked in their favour, assisting their survival. No statement of doctrine meant no danger of heresy that might have led to their suppression. Since, however, they indicate a close, even intimate, relationship, between philosopher and apostle, a reader would be entitled to infer that they had discussed Paul's beliefs. No Christian could have believed that Paul would have

¹⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 11, with notes 10 and 11.

¹⁵ In the reign of Constantine, Lactantius bemoaned the lack of competent Christian scholars (*Diu. Inst.* V. ii. 1). Millard points out that "in many societies" reading and writing are not always indivisibly linked (Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p. 155). In such societies there will be more people who can read, even if not fluently, than can write.

¹⁶ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 81, 82, 87.

¹⁷ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 81.

been unable to influence Seneca to adopt a sympathetic view towards Christianity, at the very least.

We turn now to what some contemporary Christian authors wrote about the correspondence.

1. 2 The Evidence of St. Jerome

St. Jerome cites the correspondence in the entry on Seneca in *De uiris illustribus* XII.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca Cordubensis, Sotionis stoici discipulus et patruus Lucani poetae, continentissimae uitae fuit. Quem non ponerem in catalogo sanctorum, nisi me illae epistolae prouocarent quae leguntur a plurimis, Pauli ad Senecam aut Senecae ad Paulum, in quibus, cum esset Neronis magister et illius temporis potentissimus, optare se dicit eius esse loci apud suos cuius sit Paulus apud Christianos. Hic ante biennium quam Petrus et Paulus martyrio coronarentur a Nerone interfectus est.

Jerome's choice on who would be included in his collection of abbreviated biographies is idiosyncratic.¹⁸ Seneca is the only pagan to be listed, surely a significant inclusion.

*Quem (sc. Senecam) non ponerem in catalogo sanctorum, nisi me illae epistolae prouocarent quae leguntur a plurimis, Pauli ad Senecam, aut Senecae ad Paulum.*¹⁹

The last part of the extract is significant.

Hic ante biennium quam Petrus et Paulus martyrio coronarentur, a Nerone interfectus est.

Jerome's notice could be read as linking Seneca's death with the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul. The reader can thus gain the impression that Jerome was making a connection between the three men, the apostles of Christianity and the Roman philosopher. All three died at approximately the same time and all were victims of Neronian persecution.²⁰ To Jerome the juxtaposition was no more than a convenient chronological marker. To less sophisticated readers,

¹⁸ Marcia L Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. II, *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*, studies in the history of Christian thought, vol. XXXIV, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985, p. 83.

¹⁹ St. Jerome, *Liber de uiris illustribus* XII (Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 122).

²⁰ There is a tradition that the apostles died on the same date a year apart (Henry Chadwick, 'St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome: The Problem of the *Memoria Apostolorum ad Catacumbas*,' in Henry Chadwick, *History and Thought of the Early Church*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1982, p. 50 with note 4).

and listeners, it would have assumed greater importance. This citation would be influential for the perception of Seneca in future ages and was frequently attached to manuscripts of the letters. It gave added credence to the letters in contemporary eyes also.

St. Jerome's attitude to Seneca is ambivalent. On the one hand he is worthy of praise: *continentissimae uitae fuit*. On the other hand, Jerome declares that he would not include the Stoic philosopher *in catalogo sanctorum, nisi me illae epistolae prouocarent*.²¹ Seneca's way of life, no matter how admirable it had been, was not sufficient reason to have him included in Jerome's *catalogus*. More, or something different, was required. That something was supplied by the *Epistolae... Pauli ad Senecam, aut Senecae ad Paulum*.

There is another point of interest in Jerome's brief biography. Seneca is reported as *Neronis magister et illius temporis potentissimus* only after the correspondence is noted. The description might have been expected at the beginning of the notice where Seneca is described as *Cordubensis*, a follower of the Stoic Sotion and uncle to Lucan. Jerome appears to be emphasising Seneca's power and prestige in connection with his supposed friendship with the apostle.

It is difficult to decide whether Jerome had read these letters or whether he had merely heard of them.²² There is one hint in the entry to indicate the possibility that he could have read at least one of the letters. He paraphrases the last part of *Ep. XII*:²³ ... *optare se dicit, eius esse loci apud suos, cuius sit Paulus apud Christianos*.²⁴ This is reminiscent of the end of the letter attributed to Seneca but it is not an exact rendering of *Ep. XII: nam qui meus tuus apud te locus, qui tuus uelim ut meus*.²⁵ Barlow,²⁶ followed by Sevenster²⁷ and Elliott,²⁸ translates this sentence: "For I wish that my position were yours in your writings and that yours were as mine." James translates

²¹ Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

²² Trillitzsch suggests that Jerome had been sent a copy (Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, pp. 159-160).

²³ Using Barlow's numeration (Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 134-135); Migne (*P. L.* 23, p. 630, note [h]), numbers it the sixth letter.

²⁴ Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

²⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. XII*, p. 135; see also Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, pp. 13-14.

²⁶ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 148.

²⁷ Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, p. 12, with note 2.

²⁸ Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 552.

the same sentence as “For the rank that is mine I would it were yours, and yours I would were mine.”²⁹ Römer offers the following translation: “For I could wish that my place could be yours in your letters and yours mine.”³⁰

It is difficult to understand what the writer meant. Barlow suggests that Seneca is acknowledging Paul’s attempt, in *Ep. X*, to defer to the senator.³¹ It is not surprising that Jerome, or perhaps his source if he himself did not have first-hand knowledge of the letters, felt the need for expansion and interpretation.

St. Jerome had a particular reason for accepting the authenticity of the letters. His love of pagan learning was criticised by some Christians and he himself suffered pangs of guilt because of his preference for the elegant style of pagan literature rather than the simplistic style of many Christian works.³² If, however, Seneca had been on intimate terms with St. Paul, then the philosopher could be seen as at least a Christian sympathiser. His works could therefore be read with a clear conscience and could be recommended to other Christians.

1. 3 St. Augustine on Seneca and the Correspondence

St. Augustine also mentions the correspondence.³³ His notice is even briefer than that of Jerome. This in itself could be significant. It might imply that the letters have now, some eleven years after the appearance of Jerome’s *De uiris illustribus*,³⁴ become part of the Christian literary landscape and there is thus no need to dwell on them. Alternatively it could mean that the Bishop of Hippo prefers not to draw attention to writings he considers doubtful. His citation does carry a hint that he believed it possible that Seneca might have been sympathetic to Christianity. This impression is reinforced by a discussion in *De ciuitate Dei*. Augustine records Seneca’s criticism of Jewish institutions but notes that he fails to mention Christianity.³⁵ Augustine interprets this silence to mean that the philosopher was unwilling to attack Christianity because of his own

²⁹ James (trans), *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 483.

³⁰ Cornelia Römer, ‘The Correspondence between Seneca and Paul,’ in *New Testament Apocrypha*, (1992), p.51.

³¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 144-145, note 2.

³² See below, p. 174 and Chapter 4. 7.

³³ St. Augustine, *Ep.* CLIII. 14.

³⁴ A.D. 413-414.

³⁵ St. Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* VI. xi.

sympathies.³⁶ Augustine, then, was of the opinion that Seneca knew enough about Christian beliefs to form an opinion. It is unclear whether he came to that conclusion because of the letters or because of material contained in Seneca's genuine works. St. Augustine does not suggest that the reason for Seneca's failure to mention Christianity is that he knew nothing of its existence.

Augustine's reference to the fictitious correspondence does not indicate whether he himself has read the letters or is relying on second-hand reports.³⁷ Like Jerome he does not share Lactantius' enthusiasm for Seneca. He berates the philosopher for hypocrisy, for example, because he advocated conformity to Roman tradition, including public worship of gods privately disregarded.³⁸ Yet he was prepared to concede that Seneca had been freed, in a sense, by philosophy.³⁹ Here is an echo of Lactantius who advocated that everyone should adopt wisdom along with *uera religio*.⁴⁰

We turn now to the question of how many Christians would have been able to read the letters for themselves. This question has a bearing on how quickly the story of the friendship between Seneca and St. Paul spread amongst Christians and also how many Christians could have read Seneca's works. Is it possible to quantify Jerome's *plurimi*?

1. 4 Christian Literacy

The literacy rate amongst Christians has a bearing on how many of them would have been able to read the letters. The nature of their education influenced whether or not they were already acquainted with Senecan thought. A craftsman, especially a freedman, for example, might have received practical training, à la Trimalchio, which did not include the study of Seneca's works. An estimate of the number of literate Christians also gives an indication of how many would

³⁶ *Christianos tamen iam tunc Iudaeis inimicissimos in neutram partem commemorare ausus est, ne uel laudaret contra suae patriae ueterem consuetudinem, uel reprehenderet contra propriam forsitan uoluntatem* (St. Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* VI. xi).

³⁷ Hagendahl is confident that Augustine's information comes from Jerome (Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics, A Study of the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers*, Göteborg: Elanders, 1958, vol. II, p. 677).

³⁸ *unde in his sacris ciuilibus theologiae has partes potius elegit Seneca sapienti, ut eas in animi religione non habeat, sed in actibus fingat. ait enim: "quae omnia sapiens seruabit tamquam legibus iussa ... adorabimus ut meminerimus cultum eius magis ad morem quam ad rem pertinere* (St. Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* VI. x).

³⁹ *quem philosophi quasi liberum fecerunt* (St. Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* VI. x).

⁴⁰ Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* VII. xxvii. 1.

have been available to read the correspondence to their illiterate brethren and perhaps to explain the various references to those ignorant of the background. The extent of Christian literacy also bears on the question of the number of Christians who could have been persuaded by the correspondence to read Seneca's works for themselves.

Most Christians of the time were not well educated, or even literate, any more than was the bulk of the general population. In light of the sneers levelled by non-Christian critics it could indeed be argued that they were less likely to be well educated. Even if the (probably) inflated figure of a 20% literacy rate amongst Christian men is accepted, there is every possibility that a high proportion of these were able to read only at a basic functional level.⁴¹ It follows that at least 80% of Christians were dependent on others for any acquaintance with literature. These are the people, as well as those who did the actual reading, to whom Jerome refers when he states that the letters *leguntur a plurimis*.

The illiterate and semi-literate often have an exaggerated respect for the written word. If it is written it must be true. This would be reinforced by a society like that of the Roman empire that has been described as "residually oral."⁴² In such a society a highly literate elite holds official power and affects the lives of the entire population by means of "the promulgation of official and legal documents."⁴³ This situation is substantially unaltered by the fact that in the society in question men and women of low status (ex-slaves and sometimes slaves) could possess a high level of literacy and training. The men at least could also be extremely wealthy and could even exercise great power, even if under another's authority.

As well as this respect for literacy, and those who practised it, held by the general population, Christians had an additional reason for revering the written word. They had inherited the Jewish textual tradition, writing as the word of God. Such people would have had no reason to suspect the authenticity of the correspondence. Speyer suggests that the concept of a god who writes

⁴¹ Osiek, 'The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome,' pp. 159-160. See also Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 13, note 110. Harris (*Ancient Literacy*, p. 259) estimates male literacy in Rome and Italy as "well below" 20-30%; female literacy as below 10%, although recognising the Christian encouragement of religious reading (p. 331).

⁴² Osiek, 'The Oral World of Early Christianity,' p.156.

⁴³ Osiek, 'The Oral World of Early Christianity,' p.158. See also Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 39 and Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 13, n. 111.

must have seemed a novelty to those of both Greek and Roman culture: “Nach dem glauben der Griechen schrieben die Götter nicht.”⁴⁴ This statement is an exaggeration. The gods did on occasion communicate with humanity via the written word.⁴⁵ Perhaps more importantly, at least as an impetus for learning to write, humanity communicated with the gods in the same manner.⁴⁶

It could, however, be argued that Christianity was likely to encourage literacy amongst its converts and to attract adherents who were already literate. Christianity had inherited its status as a religion of the book from Judaism.⁴⁷ This status would have encouraged converts to learn to read, especially those who had already mastered the basics. Christianity appears to have made many converts amongst the urbanised ‘middle class’, people of some substance who possessed trade skills. Harris notes a recommendation that the practitioners of various crafts be literate.⁴⁸ Horsfall suggests that an enhanced opportunity for improvement in the ability to make a living acts as a powerful stimulus to improved literacy.⁴⁹ If artisans were expected to be literate, then they would have been well advised to cultivate or acquire the skill. If Harris is correct and literacy amongst artisans could not be assumed, then the literate practitioner would have an advantage over his, or her, illiterate rivals, especially in areas in which members of the upper classes made recommendations.⁵⁰ A reader of Soranus’ *Gynecology* might well follow the author’s advice and seek out a literate midwife.⁵¹

An admiration for literacy and learning had long existed in Roman society. The ‘baker and his wife’ from Pompeii are portrayed accompanied by a papyrus roll and a writing tablet and stylus;⁵² literate children are pictured on sarcophagi.⁵³

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Speyer, ‘Religiöse Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im Altertum,’ *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 8/9 (1965/66): 104.

⁴⁵ Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, pp. 39, 218; Beard, ‘Writing and Religion’ in *Literacy in the Roman World*, p. 50f.

⁴⁶ Beard, ‘Writing and Religion,’ in *Literacy in the Roman World*, p. 39f.

⁴⁷ See, for example, G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. I, p. 18; also Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, p. 157-158.

⁴⁸ Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 203.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Horsfall, ‘Statistics or States of Mind?’ in *Literacy in the Roman World*, pp. 63-68; Peter Lampe, *Die Stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*², p. 192, note 233.

⁵⁰ Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 203.

⁵¹ Soranus, *Gynecology* i.3; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 203.

⁵² Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, p. 62, figure 12. It is unimportant whether or not they were literate; the important point is that they are portrayed as such.

A rural/urban divide is possible and even likely. The majority of the population were rural labourers, either enslaved or free. It is unlikely that many of these people were given the opportunity to learn how to read and write. Urban life presented many more possibilities. There was more reading matter readily available, not only in the form of books, but as inscriptions of all kinds, graffiti, election 'posters' and so forth. There was also a better chance of finding a teacher. It is possible that the degree of literacy in this world has been underestimated. Both Anonymous and Hermas were Christians. Their religious beliefs provided the impetus and the inspiration for their writings. Other Christians, who appreciated what they had to say, have preserved their work. Any possible pagan equivalents lacked both their religious zeal to compose a similar opus and an organised community to appreciate and preserve it.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from this uncertain evidence. Some tentative suggestions can be advanced. Early Christianity was an urban phenomenon and was attractive to the artisan 'middle class' who were likely to possess at least basic literary skills. Hopkins estimates that there was one sophisticated literate reader for each Christian community by the end of the second Christian century.⁵⁴ Most Christians, then, possibly even all Christians, would have had access to approved literature. Acquaintance with the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul could very well have persuaded literate enthusiasts to read Seneca, even if in epitomised form.

One social group in the fourth century whose members were literate and also acquainted with some of Seneca's works was the Roman aristocracy. The following section engages briefly with this group. Chapter Six considers in greater detail the problems they posed for those Christians who wished to convert all of Roman society.

⁵³ Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, Alan Shapiro (trans.), Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 268-277.

⁵⁴ Keith Hopkins, 'Christian Number and Its Implications,' p. 213.

1. 5 Vying for the Allegiance of the Elite

It has been suggested that at about the same time as the letters appeared there was a revival of paganism.⁵⁵ Perhaps the circulation of the Senecan/Pauline correspondence was in response to this appeal to antiquity. It would demonstrate that Seneca, Roman philosopher and *amicus Caesaris*, had been a Christian sympathiser. Such a demonstration could buttress the beliefs of the faithful and perhaps even convince apostates such as the senator to whom an unknown author addressed his *ad quendam senatorem ex Christiana religione ad idolorum seruitutem conuersum*.⁵⁶

It was hardly necessary for such a revival as far as Rome's senatorial nobility was concerned. Christianity had made limited inroads in the west up to the end of the fourth century.⁵⁷ Salzman's study indicates that there were approximately equal numbers of pagan and Christian senators in the years from 367 to 383 A.D.⁵⁸ According to some scholars Christian senatorial aristocrats did not outnumber pagans until somewhere between A. D. 404 and 415.⁵⁹ Salzman suggests that Rome's senatorial elite continued to be largely pagan until the 390s.⁶⁰ One aristocratic Roman family included some Christian members in the last years of the fourth century and some polytheists in the early fifth century.⁶¹ Given the importance of the patron/client relationship in Rome the likelihood is that clients tended to follow their patron's religious practices; those members of the *familia* living under the same roof were probably given no choice. A converted aristocrat carried with him his *familia* and possibly his clients. Conversely, the household and clients of a pagan tended to remain pagan. Ambition at a lower level mirrors that of the ambition of high status groups. A client, especially a freedman, desiring his patron's support, would be

⁵⁵ For further discussion of this point, see N. Q. King, 'The Pagan Resurgence of 393 - Some Contemporary Sources,' in *Studia Patristica* vol. IV, papers presented to the Third International Conference on Patristic Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1959, Part II. (*Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur*, Band 79), Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961, pp. 472-477.

⁵⁶ King, 'The Pagan Resurgence of 393,' p. 474.

⁵⁷ For further discussion, see A. H. M. Jones, 'The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity', in Arnaldo Momigliano (ed), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 19-21, 31, 33, 37 and Rita Lizzi, 'Ambrose's Contemporaries and the Christianization of Northern Italy,' *JRS* 80 (1990), pp. 161f, 170-171. See also Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 71, 75, 79f with note 54, 117f.

⁵⁸ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p.122.

⁵⁹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 79 with note 56.

⁶⁰ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 79-80.

⁶¹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 80-81.

inclined to follow that patron's religious preference if he believed that it would help his case. This has important implications for the religious make-up of any urban area.

The enquiry turns now to a consideration of possible motives behind the creation of the correspondence.

1. 6 The Origin of the Correspondence

The correspondence indicates something of the esteem in which Seneca was held by many early Latin-speaking Christians.⁶² So much of Seneca's thought is compatible with Christian belief that it did not seem possible that a pagan could have come unaided to such a high level of ethical understanding. There must have been Christian inspiration. Who better to have supplied such influence than the apostle who was a contemporary, who was believed to have been in Rome in (probably) A.D. 61 and who was martyred, according to pious legend, by the same emperor responsible for Seneca's own death?⁶³ Our anonymous author was so convinced of Seneca's knowledge of, and sympathy with, Christian belief, and his of acquaintance with Paul, that he wrote fourteen letters in the name of the philosopher and the apostle.

Scholars have proposed various motives to explain the creation of the correspondence. I shall briefly canvass some of them. Elliott proposes that their purpose was to demonstrate the "superiority of Christianity over pagan philosophy."⁶⁴ Ehrman suggests that Anonymous composed his work in order to promote the importance of St. Paul.⁶⁵ Despite his pivotal role amongst early Christian believers Paul was completely unknown to the wider world. The correspondence would provide evidence that the apostle in fact had not been an obscure person of little importance. He had been on intimate terms with Seneca, the greatest Roman scholar and philosopher of his day and, at least for a time, *illius temporis potentissimus*.⁶⁶ The emperor himself was acquainted with his religious beliefs and was impressed by his insight.⁶⁷

⁶² ... *leguntur a plurimis* ... See text above.

⁶³ Ephesians; Michael Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions*, London: SCM Press, 1994, p. 192.

⁶⁴ Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 547.

⁶⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, p. 160.

⁶⁶ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

⁶⁷ Barlow (ed), *Epistolae, Ep.* VII. See also the commentary on *Ep.* VII below.

Bischoff has suggested that these letters were written to counter a Jewish work, *Epistola Anne ad Senecam de superbia et idolis*.⁶⁸ Unusually for Jewish apologetics, this document was apparently written originally in Latin.⁶⁹ It is possible that this *Epistola* was written in reply to the Senecan/Pauline correspondence although Bischoff believes that the *Epistola Anne* is the earlier work.⁷⁰

Barlow has put forward yet another possibility: that it is the result of an exercise set by a rhetorical school.⁷¹ It is the type of letter that Seneca and Paul would have written to each other. Speyer is not inclined to accept Barlow's suggestion.⁷² He believes that it is at least possible that the letters were a literary production whose later use was not foreseen by their author.⁷³ The suggestion by Trapp that the correspondence belongs to the long established tradition of an author attributing his own composition to some great figure of the past, seems, on balance, to be the most likely explanation for its existence.⁷⁴ This idea is explored further in the following sections.

1. 7 Letters as Literature

The author of this fictitious correspondence was so convinced that Seneca was a secret sympathiser of Christianity that he set out to provide evidence. Such action was not unknown or even unusual. The Gospels, for example, were written in the name of disciples who were probably not their authors; the pastoral letters were written in Paul's name. Their real author lacked the apostle's authority and was convinced that that is what Paul would have written under the circumstances. The attitude is no different from that of historians of the ancient world who

⁶⁸ Bernhard Bischoff, 'Der Brief des Hohenpriesters Annas an den Philosophen Seneca - eine jüdisch-apologetische Missionschrift (Viertes Jahrhundert?)', in Bernhard Bischoff (ed), *Anecdota Nouissima. Texte des vierten bis sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, Band VII, Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1984, pp. 2, 5.

⁶⁹ Bischoff, 'Der Brief des Hohenpriesters Annas,' p. 3.

⁷⁰ Bischoff, 'Der Brief des Hohenpriesters Annas,' p. 5.

⁷¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 91.

⁷² Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum. Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft erste Abteilung, zweiter Teil, München: Beck, 1971, p. 258.

⁷³ Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum*, p. 178.

⁷⁴ Michael Trapp (ed), *Greek and Latin Letters. An Anthology, with Translation*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 22, 27-28.

did not hesitate to compose speeches for historical figures. They gave them the kind of speeches they would have made under the circumstances described.

In the high culture of the Roman world letters also had a place, even if a minor one, as works of literature, and of instruction. One has only to think of the correspondence of Cicero or Seneca or Pliny the Younger, or, closer in time to the date of composition of the letters under discussion, the correspondence between Symmachus and Ausonius.

Seneca's correspondence with Lucilius is one-sided. There is scholarly disagreement as to whether it is a genuine correspondence or a literary device to provide a practical manual on how to live the Stoic life, or at least Seneca's version of the Stoic life. The vast bulk of Pliny's letters, nine books out of a total of ten books, likewise have no replies, or at least none that has survived, assuming that they formed originally one side of a genuine correspondence. Book X alone contains both sides of the correspondence.

Cicero's letters are less mannered than those of either Seneca or Pliny. The correspondence addressed to the great and powerful men of his day is formal, but those written to family and close friends read like genuinely personal letters. None of Atticus' replies have survived, but other replies have, from Cato and Caesar to give just two examples.

Despite the fact that the collection of letters written under the names of Seneca and St. Paul is supposed to be a two-sided correspondence, 'Seneca' and 'Paul' rarely reply to each other, rather they speak past each other.⁷⁵ P does not reply, for example, to S's reproaches on his poor Latin. Nor does he acknowledge receipt of the manual on style. The main exception is P's reproach when S informs him that he has read some Christian work to Nero.

⁷⁵ It is tiresome to enclose 'Paul' and 'Seneca' within quotation marks, or to qualify the names in some other manner so as to make it clear that the historical St. Paul and the historical Seneca are not meant. I shall therefore use P in referring to those letters supposedly written by the Apostle, and S when discussing the letters the author wrote under Seneca's name. I wish to thank Christopher Elliott for this suggestion.

1. 8 Letters as Stories

Trapp suggests that some pseudepigraphic collections of letters were written to tell a story.⁷⁶ The letter form lends immediacy, especially if an audience is listening, rather than reading. One feels in the middle of the action. There is also a sense of direct contact with the letter writer. The whole story is related in direct speech without editorial comment.

A narrative can be discerned in this correspondence. In the first letter ‘Seneca’ and ‘Lucilius’ give the same serious attention to the *libellus* of Paul as the historical Seneca and Lucilius pay to the study of philosophy. S is sufficiently convinced by the Christian message to compose a Christian tract that he plans to read to Nero.⁷⁷ The tone is positive and even optimistic, except for P’s apparent reluctance, despite S’s encouragement, to come to Rome. This attitude changes in the letter (*Ep.* XI) that deals with the fire and the persecution that followed.

Epp. XII to XIV are out of sequence.⁷⁸ Placed in their supposed chronological order they would precede *Ep.* XI. This order would make better sense in terms of the story line.⁷⁹

There are minor plots in addition to the main narrative. One portrays Seneca as Christian missionary to Nero’s court,⁸⁰ describing Paul’s first, cautious, even adverse reaction,⁸¹ then apparent acceptance of this role.⁸²

Another deals with Seneca’s criticism of St. Paul’s poor Latin style and his proposals to improve it.⁸³

Trapp also suggests filling in a gap in the historical record as a motive for inventing an exchange of letters.⁸⁴ In this instance the gap is perceived rather than real. It has already been noted that

⁷⁶ Trapp (ed.), *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 30-31.

⁷⁷ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* III and p. 37f. See also discussion below.

⁷⁸ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 145, n. 1.

⁷⁹ But see Trapp (ed.), *Greek and Latin Letters*, p. 30, note 124.

⁸⁰ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Epp.* III, VII. See also commentaries below.

⁸¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* VIII. See also commentary below.

⁸² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* XIV. See also commentary below.

⁸³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Epp.* VII (*Vellem... ut maiestati earum cultus sermonis non desit*); *Ep.* IX (*Misi tibi librum de uerborum copia*); *Ep.* XIII. See also Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 144, note 1 and commentaries below.

there is no evidence to suggest that Seneca and St. Paul were in contact with each other. Nevertheless there are many people who cannot believe that they were unknown to each other when they were contemporaries living in the same world, even for a time (perhaps) in the same city.⁸⁵ Paul also had a connection, no matter how brief and tenuous, to Seneca's brother, Gallio.⁸⁶

The second half of the fourth century, extending into the fifth, was a golden age of Christian letter writing.⁸⁷ Thousands of Christian letters survive from this period.⁸⁸ It is not surprising then that our anonymous author chose the genre to demonstrate that Seneca had been a Christian or at least a sympathiser. It could be, too, that the author's literary ability did not extend to the composition of a lengthy piece of continuous prose. The letter format is easier to handle. This is especially applicable if his education had ended with the *grammaticus*. Letter writing, as well as elementary exercises in rhetoric, appears to have been taught at this level, although it is not known precisely what was taught nor how widespread was the practice.⁸⁹

1. 9 Christian Literature in Latin

The first Christian writings were in Greek. Paul's letters to various congregations, including that of Rome, were in Greek. It is possible that he knew no Latin. The Christian group or groups in Rome to which he wrote were Greek-speaking, the first Christians in Rome being Hellenised Jews.⁹⁰ By the time Paul wrote his *Epistle to the Romans* the position of these people as leaders of Roman Christianity had been usurped by Gentiles who were also, however, Greek-speaking. The Christians of Rome continued to be largely Greek speaking for several generations.⁹¹ Christian literature in Latin seems to have begun no earlier than the early years of the third century.⁹² Several generations of western Christians were Greek-speaking inheritors, or

⁸⁴ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, p. 28.

⁸⁵ See Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, p. 6ff.

⁸⁶ Acts 18. 12, 14; see also p. 206 below.

⁸⁷ Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, p. 45; Trapp (ed), *Greek and Latin Letters*, p. 17f.

⁸⁸ Stowers, *Letter Writing*, p. 45; Trapp (ed), *Greek and Latin Letters*, p. 17f.

⁸⁹ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 37-38; Stowers, *Letter Writing*, p. 32.

⁹⁰ For further discussion of this point, see pp. 190-191 below.

⁹¹ See below, also Chapter 5. 2 and 3.

⁹² Christine Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin: Its Origins and Character. Three Lectures*, London: Burns and Oates, 1959, p. 42.

usurpers, of the Septuagint, the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.⁹³ There were no Latin translations of Jewish texts.⁹⁴ Many of the earliest Christians were Jews, more or less Hellenised and certainly Greek-speaking,⁹⁵ others were God-fearers attracted first to the synagogue, then to the Jesus movement, and also Greek speakers.⁹⁶ As Christian prayers and scripture were composed, and Christian religious terminology grew, these also were in Greek.⁹⁷

Early Latin translations used a word-for-word method, a literal translation.⁹⁸ This is not surprising. These were regarded as sacred texts that were not to be tampered with.⁹⁹ The result was embarrassingly barbarous Latin to the ears of educated Latin speakers.¹⁰⁰

As Christianity spread among Latin speakers there was an obvious need for both translations of existing Greek works and even more importantly Christian literature written in Latin. The number of Christians literate in both languages would have been even smaller than those literate in either one. There is no reason to believe that Hellenised Christian writings were treated differently from earlier Greek legacies. They were translated, imitated and adapted by their Roman heirs.

Whatever the origin of the apocryphal correspondence between Paul and Seneca it filled various needs: it was in Latin, it demonstrated that even in the movement's infancy it had attracted the sympathetic interest of some in positions of power and it emphasised the supposed high status of Paul himself. Seneca's own reputation as a Stoic philosopher helped to demonstrate that Christianity was a valid way of life for Romans rather than a foreign cult worthy only of suppression.

⁹³ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, pp. 30, 31.

⁹⁴ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p.31. Daniélou has suggested that the Septuagint was translated into Latin (*The Origins of Latin Christianity*, p. 6). This point is discussed further below, p.190.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ God-fearers may be defined as non-Jews who attached themselves to the Jewish community, attending the synagogue, and following some, or all, Jewish traditions, such as participating in Jewish festivals, observing the Sabbath and abstaining from pork. They covered a wide range, from those who did no more than contribute to synagogue coffers, usually for some particular purpose, often a building fund, to those who stopped just short of conversion. See also pp. 210, 219- 220 below.

⁹⁷ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 30.

⁹⁸ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 32.

⁹⁹ Clarke, *Letters of St. Cyprian*, vol. I, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ St. Augustine, Confessions III. 5, De catechizandis rudibus 9 (13); Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 35.

These letters could have sparked an interest in Seneca's genuine work amongst Christians, encouraging the literate to read them and also perhaps encouraging the development of various epitomes. Senecan *florilegia* probably already existed;¹⁰¹ it was merely a matter of deleting those maxims offensive to Christian sensibilities.

Those with insufficient skill to read with understanding Seneca's thought in its original context could perhaps have coped with a collection of pithy sayings. Much of Seneca's writing is susceptible to excerption. Censorship is another advantage of such gleaning. Elements unsuitable for Christian eyes can be excised.

Barlow believes that one manuscript he examined is a copy of an original whose date is as early as the fifth century, the sixth at the latest.¹⁰² He has based his edition of the correspondence on a few twelfth-century manuscripts and all older ones of which he had any notice.¹⁰³

The letters recall the time when Rome was the capital of the world. By the time they were actually written, Constantine had moved his capital to Byzantium and founded Constantinople. This led to the division of the empire between east and west in 395. The imperial government in the west divided its time between Milan, Trier and Ravenna. It must have become increasingly obvious towards the end of the fourth century that the supremacy of the city of Rome was past. It is true that there was still a senate in Rome. There was also a number of old, conservative, and powerful, senatorial families who remained centred on Rome.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the author of the letters hoped to convince the members of such families of the inherent 'Romanness' of Christianity. If the great Seneca had been convinced by the Christian message then they had no reason to remain aloof. Whether such well-educated aristocrats would have accepted the letters as genuine, especially those supposedly written by Seneca, is doubtful. There were, however, groups lower in the social structure whose members were sufficiently literate to be able to read the letters, but

¹⁰¹ Lampe, *Die Stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 227. There had been great reliance on handbooks and anthologies during the mid second century (Lampe, *Die Stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 255). Summaries of Greek philosophical works were popular during Seneca's lifetime (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 5). There is no reason to believe that Latin authors were not treated similarly.

¹⁰² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 35.

¹⁰³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 39.

whose skill was insufficient to create a doubt on their authenticity. I am referring to people of similar status as most of those represented by the writers of the Vindolanda tablets. It is the discovery of these tablets in addition to the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the anonymous author of this correspondence that should give us pause to wonder if in fact basic literacy was more common in this world than we believe.¹⁰⁵ The elder Pliny supplies evidence in support when he modestly categorises his encyclopaedia as written for *humili uulgo... agricolarum, opificum turbae*.¹⁰⁶ The upper classes in any society are not always a reliable source of information on the lower orders. Does Pliny actually know (and how does he know?) that the *humilis uulgo* is able to read his work and would want to? His modest expectation of the sort of people likely to be interested in his work is possibly as much of a device as his dedication to Titus and his disclaimer that he does not anticipate that the emperor will choose to read it, all the while ensuring that the books are so organised as to make it an easy task to ‘dip into’ them rather than having to read the entire opus. At the same time, of course, the organisation of the work makes it possible, and cheaper, for the *opifex* to purchase only that portion relevant to his, or her, own needs.

1. 10 Legal Action against Paganism¹⁰⁷

In 380 Theodosius I issued the decree *cunctos populos* that made orthodox Christianity the official religion.¹⁰⁸ The bishops of Rome and of Alexandria would be the judges of orthodoxy.¹⁰⁹ Although Christianity was now the official religion of the empire, other religions were not forbidden.¹¹⁰ This tolerant pluralism would quickly change. In 391 three laws were issued designed to end pagan worship.¹¹¹ How well they were enforced is open to question. Passage of legislation does not necessarily mean that it is, or can be, implemented.¹¹² Attempts at enforcing

¹⁰⁵ See Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 130, 172f.

¹⁰⁶ Pliny, *H. N. praef.* 6.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Six.

¹⁰⁸ *Cod. Theod.* XVI. i. 2; Wolfram Kinzig, ‘“Non-Separation”: Closeness and Co-operation between Jews and Christians in the Fourth Century’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991), p. 38.

¹⁰⁹ Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, p.13.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Cod. Theod.* XVI. x. 10, 11; XVI. vii. 4-5; Herbert Bloch, ‘The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century,’ in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, p. 198.

¹¹² For an extended discussion of this point, see Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred, Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 38 ff.

these particular laws were sometimes met with violent resistance.¹¹³ Some pagans were determined to continue to follow the old religion in the teeth of all opposition. In 407 Honorius issued a constitution confiscating the endowments of temples and ordering the removal of cult images as well as the demolition of altars.¹¹⁴ This law was enacted in response to the complaints from an African bishop.¹¹⁵ That the problem was not confined to Africa, and that the law was ineffective, is demonstrated by its reiteration in 415, when it was also extended to other dioceses.¹¹⁶ Pagan worship was still being denounced in seventh-century Gaul.¹¹⁷ Even at the end of the thirteenth century in a France that was supposedly thoroughly Christian, the Inquisition Registers of Jacques Fournier reveal the survival of an astonishing range of non-Christian beliefs.¹¹⁸

Ambrose boasted in the 380s of a largely Christian Senate.¹¹⁹ Such a claim should be regarded with some scepticism. St. Augustine complains that *tunc tota fere Romana nobilitas...* “were worshippers of idols...”¹²⁰ *Tunc* here is vague, referring to sometime in the fourth century, before Augustine’s conversion, so presumably before 380. Even Ambrose’s claim is accepted, however, it is remarkable that in a supposedly Christian empire under the leadership of a Christian autocrat the Roman Senate was not yet wholly Christian. Rome was no longer the administrative capital of the empire but it retained the unique role as its symbolic centre.¹²¹ Christian emperors continued to bear the title of *pontifex maximus* until about 382 when Gratian renounced it.¹²² The emperor was rarely in Rome during the fourth century and the senate acted in his place.¹²³ In short, a largely pagan body continued to oversee Rome itself. Those ancient,

¹¹³ Sozomen vii. 15; A. H. M. Jones, ‘The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity,’ in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, p. 32; Bloch, ‘The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century,’ in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, p.198; Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-60. A Social Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol. II, Oxford: Blackwell. 1973, pp. 942-943.

¹¹⁴ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, vol. II, p. 938, with note 2

¹¹⁵ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, vol. II, p. 938.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, vol. II, p. 939f.

¹¹⁸ As well as the Registers themselves, see Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, pp. 322, 345f.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *Epp.* 72 [17]. 9, 73 [18]. 31 (CSEL 82. 3. 14-15, 50).

¹²⁰ *Confessions* VIII. ii.

¹²¹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 73.

¹²² Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 73, 197.

¹²³ *ibid.*

aristocratic and still pagan families that supplied senators were too powerful to be coerced. As late as 386 pagan sacrifice was still being tolerated in Rome, even if nowhere else.¹²⁴ I will return later to the historical background of the letters.

In hindsight it seems that after the Emperor Constantine's conversion the victory of Christianity was assured. Perhaps this did not seem so towards the end of the fourth century when the correspondence appeared. It was, after all, only thirty years at most since the brief, but to Christians, alarming reign of Julian.¹²⁵ As emperor he had attempted to restore the ancient traditions and rituals. The most alarming aspect about Julian was that he was no pagan aristocrat clinging grimly to the old ways. He was Christian by birth and upbringing, yet had repudiated this faith in favour of paganism.¹²⁶ Other Christians too had shown that their allegiance could change under the influence of an emperor or of their own ambition. Following Julian's example one Felix had converted from Christianity to paganism.¹²⁷ There could be no confidence that a similar situation would not arise again. The army's first choice to succeed Julian was a pagan, Salutius. It was only when he refused that the Christian Jovian was elected.¹²⁸ Strong pagan representation remained in the Senate of Rome and pagan senators were still so influential that in 392 the pretender Eugenius, at least nominally a Christian, was prepared to bid for their support. Further implications of Julian's reign, and that of Eugenius, will be discussed in Chapter Six.

In the fourth century, then, there still existed a need to invent stories about the interest inspired by Christianity during its earliest period, an interest that had been demonstrated at the highest level. It was also thought to be important to stress the high social standing of the apostles, as demonstrated by the circles in which they moved, and where they are pictured as being at ease. None of these elements is surprising during the first two, or even three, centuries when the threat of persecution was always present, even when its actuality was not. The first Christian groups needed heroes. In the hierarchical world of the Roman Empire there was a need to believe that

¹²⁴ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 73.

¹²⁵ See Peter Brown, *The Last Pagan Emperor: Robert Browning's The Emperor Julian* in Peter Bown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, London: Faber and Faber, 1982, p. 85.

¹²⁶ Joseph Vogt, 'Pagans and Christians in the Family of Constantine the Great', in Arnaldo Momigliano (ed), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 47, 50-52.

¹²⁷ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 127 with note 80.

¹²⁸ G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, London: Duckworth, 1978, p.118.

some of those in authority were also convinced by the Christian message. This is part of a general tendency to exaggerate the status of early Christians and to claim people of high status as Christians.¹²⁹

There are interesting parallels between the letters and the various apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, in which the apostle concerned converts a woman of high status who is married to a powerful man.¹³⁰ The correspondence between S and P offer a twist on this theme. It is the *domina* who is represented as being unsympathetic to the apostle because he has abandoned Judaism.¹³¹ It is the emperor himself who is pictured as being interested in, and impressed by, P's ideas.¹³² A comparison between the P of these letters and the Paul of one of these apocryphal Acts, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Paul*, is of interest.¹³³ The Paul of *The Martyrdom* is defiant, even aggressive, towards Nero.¹³⁴ He goes so far as to threaten the emperor, admittedly in his risen form, so it is not surprising that Nero is duly intimidated.¹³⁵ This attitude is in contrast to both the Paul of the canonical Acts of the Apostles, and of P, who is being presented as St. Paul, of the letters under discussion. The Paul of Acts accepts the authority of the emperor.¹³⁶ The P of the apocryphal letters is portrayed as a cautious, even timid, man, reluctant to come to Rome, fearing for his safety and needing to be reassured by Seneca.¹³⁷

Despite their similarities to the apocryphal Acts the letters show interesting differences. The letters contain no references to miracles, for example. They are plausible in that it is within the

¹²⁹ T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian. A Historical and Literary Study*, Oxford, 1971, p. 26.

¹³⁰ *Acts of Andrew* 4 f, Codex Vaticanus 808 (Aa II 1, pp38-45), Jean-Marc Prieur and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (ed), in *New Testament Apocrypha* II, 1992, pp. 128-134; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7-43, Schneemelcher (ed), in *New Testament Apocrypha* II, 1992, pp. 239-246. See also Lampe, *Die Stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 99f with note 310 on p. 102.

¹³¹ *si indignatio dominae, quod a ritu et secta ueteri recesseris et aliorum conuerteris..* (Barlow [ed], *Epistolae, Ep. V*); *cauendum est enim ne, dum me diligis, offensum dominae facias..* (Barlow [ed], *Epistolae, Ep. VIII: P to S*).

¹³² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. VII*.

¹³³ *The Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Paul* in Harry W. Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul, Historical and Judicial Context, Traditions, and Legends*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 67, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994, pp. 122-126.

¹³⁴ *The Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Paul* III (Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 124), Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 129.

¹³⁵ *The Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Paul* VI (Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 126), Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 131.

¹³⁶ Acts 25. 10-12; Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 129.

¹³⁷ See below.

bounds of possibility that Seneca and St. Paul could have met. It is just highly improbable. They are not as stridently anti-pagan. They are reasonable in tone, except when abusing Nero for his persecution of innocent Christian – and Jews.¹³⁸ Perhaps they reflect the times in which they were composed. Christianity is the official religion, so Christians could be more relaxed.

It is remarkable that more than three centuries after his death Seneca should be thought important enough in Christian communities for these letters to have been composed and read. Even more remarkable is that the Stoic philosopher is quoted, and named, by the *Concilium Turonense* in 567:¹³⁹ ... *sicut ait Seneca: Pessimum in eum uitium esse, qui in id, quod insanit, ceteros putat furere...*¹⁴⁰

The following section discusses the opening and closing greetings used by the author. These may indicate whether he is familiar with those usually employed by Seneca and thus provide some indication as to whether he has read Seneca's letters to Lucilius.

1. 11 Opening and Closing Formulae

The salutations that begin each letter, as well as the farewell, are examined briefly. The aim is to discover any evidence that the author was familiar with Seneca's practice. The opening and closing formulae may also indicate the relationship between his principals, or, rather, what he believed about the relationship.

The correspondence is in the form of letters between equals.¹⁴¹ With one exception S's letters to P begin with a similar salutation as Seneca's letters to Lucilius: *Seneca Paulo salutem*. In the *Epistulae morales* Seneca addresses Lucilius as *Lucilio suo*. The exception, *Ep. VII*, addressed to Paul and Theophilus,¹⁴² bears the more formal *Annaeus Seneca*.

¹³⁸ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep. XI* and commentary below.

¹³⁹ See Chapter 4. 9 below.

¹⁴⁰ Carolus de Clercq (ed), *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, CXLVIII A, Concilia Galliae. A. 511-A. 695*, p. 181.

¹⁴¹ See Stowers, *Letter Writing in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 58f.

¹⁴² See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 99 for the probability that "Theophilus" is Timotheus; see also Fürst, 'Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität,' *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 41(1998), p. 83.

The letters from P to S demonstrate even less variation. Two (*Epp.* II and IV) begin *Annaeo Senecae Paulus salutem*. In fact St. Paul never uses the secular greeting, χαῖρειν, the Greek equivalent of *salus*.¹⁴³ The sixth letter in Barlow's numeration is addressed to both S and Lucilius.¹⁴⁴ The last three letters from P to S (*Epp.* VIII, X and XIV), have *Senecae Paulus salutem*.¹⁴⁵ It is tempting to propose that the change, from *Annaeo Senecae* to *Senecae*, is designed to indicate a growing intimacy. This, however, presses the evidence too far.

Seneca's letters to Lucilius invariably end with a simple *uale*. The letters addressed to P show a greater variety. They range from the *ualete* of *Ep.* VII to *uale Paule carissime* (*Epp.* III and IX) to the complete, if brief, sentence of *Ep.* I: *bene te ualere, frater, cupio*. They could better be compared with the letters found at Vindolanda. These also show considerable variation in the closing greetings, even if they are, on the whole, modifications of the one pattern.¹⁴⁶ They range from the simple *uale frater* to *opto bene ualere te domine uale*.¹⁴⁷ As with the Senecan/Pauline correspondence, the opening salutation displays little variation.¹⁴⁸

The opening formulae seem to suggest that the author is imitating Seneca. The greeting that began letters, however, appears to have been standardised so nothing can be concluded from this. The closing formulae, on the other hand, suggest that the author was unaware of Seneca's practice in the *Epistulae morales*. It could, however, be argued that these are presented as personal and informal letters, in contrast to Seneca's more formal letters to Lucilius. In that case it would be appropriate to use personal greetings. It is not possible to decide, even tentatively, from these formulae whether the author was acquainted with Seneca's *Epistulae morales*.

¹⁴³ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer. His World, his Options, his Skills*, Good News Studies vol. 41, Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 1995, p. 45.

¹⁴⁴ *Senecae et Lucilio Paulus salutem*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ep.* XIV transposes the names: *Paulus Senecae salutem*.

¹⁴⁶ Alan K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and its People*, London: British Museum Press, 1994, p. 93.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Bowman, *Life and Letters*, p. 92.

1. 12 The Letters, Translation and Commentary

The Latin text and numeration of the letters reproduced here follows that of Barlow.¹⁴⁹ The English translation following each letter is based on those of Barlow, James,¹⁵⁰ Elliott¹⁵¹ and Ehrman.¹⁵² This translation underpins my understanding of what the author was attempting to convey. The translation in turn is followed by a commentary.

I

Seneca Paulo salutem.

Credo tibi, Paule, nuntiatum quod heri cum Lucilio nostro de apocryphis et aliis rebus habuerimus. Erant enim quidam disciplinarum tuarum comites mecum. Nam in hortos Sallustianos secesseramus, quo loco occasione nostri alio tendentes hi de quibus dixi uisis nobis adiuncti sunt. Certe quod tui praesentiam optauimus, et hoc scias uolo: libello tuo lecto, id est de plurimis aliquas litteras quas ad aliquam ciuitatem seu caput prouinciae direxisti mira exhortatione uitam moralem continentes, usque refecti sumus. Quos sensus non puto ex te dictos, sed per te, certe aliqando ex te et per te. Tante enim maiestas earum est rerum tantaque generositate clarent, ut uix suffecturas putem aetates hominum quae his institui perficique possint. Bene te ualere, frater, cupio.

[Seneca to Paul, Greeting

Paul, I believe that you have been told that yesterday I was discussing the apocrypha and other matters with our friend, Lucilius. For some of the followers of your beliefs were with me. We had withdrawn to the Gardens of Sallust. It was our good fortune that those I have mentioned saw us there and joined us, although they were going somewhere else, Certainly we wished that you also were present and I do want you to know this: after reading your letter we were completely revived. I mean one of the many letters containing a wonderful exhortation to an upright life that you sent to some city or the capital of a province. These thoughts, I believe, were delivered not by you, but through you, although sometimes by you, sometimes through you. For

¹⁴⁹ According to the text and numeration of Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 122-138.

¹⁵⁰ James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 480-484.

¹⁵¹ Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 549-553.

¹⁵² Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, pp. 160-164.

they are so majestic and glow with such nobility that I believe ages of men will scarcely be adequate to enable them to be implanted and perfected.

I wish you good health, brother.]

The first letter is from S to P and is supposed to be understood as continuing a correspondence rather than beginning it: *nostris... hi de quibus dixi*. It places Seneca and his friend Lucilius in surroundings traditional for a philosophical discussion in antiquity. They are strolling in a formal garden, in this case the *horti Sallustiani*. Rather than discussing the beliefs of the Stoa, however, as might be expected of the two people involved, they are discussing Paul's writings.¹⁵³ They are joined by some Christians. S praises Paul's letters for *mira exhortatione uitam moralem continentis*. Having Seneca admire the ethics of Paul's religion rather than its faith is a clever device on the part of the author. Long after his skill as an orator had ceased to be esteemed or had been forgotten, Seneca's moral writings continued to be appreciated.¹⁵⁴

Thus the scene is set. Seneca is in close contact with Paul, reads and admires his writing. More than that, both he and Lucilius know, and are known by, Roman Christians. There is more than a hint that these Christians, despite being unnamed, are also of high status. It is clear that the author knew of Seneca's friendship with Lucilius, hinting at a basic knowledge of Seneca's letters addressed to this friend.

II

Annaeo Senecae Paulus salutem.

Litteras tuas hilaris heri accepi, ad quas rescribere statim potui, si praesentiam iuuenis quem ad te eram missurus habuissem. Scis enim quando et per quem et quo tempore et cui quid dari committique debeat. Rogo ergo non putes neglectum, dum personae qualitatem respicio. Sed quod litteris meis uos bene acceptos alicubi scribis, felicem me arbitror tanti uiri iudicio. Nec enim hoc diceres, censor sophista magister tanti principis etiam omnium, nisi quia uere dicis. Opto te diu bene ualere.

¹⁵³ See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 123 for critical apparatus, p. 139, note 2 for suggested identifications of *apocryfis*.

¹⁵⁴ ... *egregius tamen uitiorum insectator fuit* (Quintilian X.i.129); *Lucius Annaeus Seneca... continentissimae uitae fuit* (Jerome, *Liber de uiris illustribus* XII).

[To Annaeus Seneca, a greeting from Paul,

I received your welcome letter yesterday and would have been able to reply at once if I had had with me the young man I had intended to send to you. For you know when and through whom and at what time and to whom something ought to be given and entrusted. So I ask you not to consider yourself neglected while I consider the quality of a person. But you write somewhere that you approve highly of my letter. I consider myself fortunate in the judgement of so great a man. For you, a severe judge, a philosopher, the teacher of so great a ruler, even of everyone, would not say this, unless you speak truthfully.

I hope that you remain long in good health.]

Ep. II is from P to S. P apologises for the delay in replying. He is anxious to find a trustworthy courier. This was a matter of great concern before the modern invention of a reliable and secure public postal system. Augustus had established the *cursus publicus* for official business,¹⁵⁵ wealthy individuals, like Seneca, had slaves who could be employed as couriers,¹⁵⁶ but most people were forced to rely on travellers who were going to the same destination as the letter and whose good faith could not always be guaranteed.¹⁵⁷ St. Paul, at least, was able to depend on his Christian couriers, as did other Christian leaders.¹⁵⁸

It is unclear whether P is worried about finding a messenger who can be trusted to deliver the letter, or whether this is a reminder to fourth-century Christians that in the not so distant past it could be dangerous to be Christian. If any of the letters fell into the wrong hands, then both P and S would have been exposed. More than four hundred years previously Cicero had had similar problems for different reasons.¹⁵⁹ He will write plainly, he tells Atticus, if he can find a

¹⁵⁵ Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions. The Letter in Greek Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 24.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, I, pp. 205-6.

¹⁵⁹ Cicero, *Ad Atticum* I. 13. 2; I. 18. 2; II. 19. 5.

completely trustworthy messenger.¹⁶⁰ Otherwise he will write *obscure* and *cetera erunt ἐν ἀίνιγμοῖς*.¹⁶¹

Knowledgeable readers of the correspondence would have appreciated the irony as P goes on to describe S as a great man and instructor of a great prince. Seneca's relationship with Nero could not save him from execution, nor were Paul's supposed connections amongst the great and powerful sufficient to rescue him from the fate ascribed him by pious legend. His manner of death is, however, of interest. According to Tacitus, Nero had the followers of *Christus* executed as common criminals; they were torn to pieces by dogs, crucified, or burnt as torches.¹⁶² Paul, on the other hand, according to tradition, was beheaded.¹⁶³ This was considered to be a less severe penalty.¹⁶⁴ Death by the sword was a more fitting end for a Roman citizen of high status.

III

Seneca Paulo salutem.

Quaedam uolumina ordinaui et diuisionibus suis statum eis dedi. Ea quoque Caesari legere destinatus. Si modo fors prospere annuerit, ut nouas aures adferat, eris forsitan et tu praesens; sin alias reddam tibi diem, ut hoc opus inuicem inspiciamus. Et possem non prius edere ei eam scripturam, nisi prius tecum conferrem, si modo impune hoc fieri potuisset, hoc ut scires, non te praeteriri. Vale Paule carissime.

[To Paul, a greeting from Seneca,

I have arranged some works and set them in their proper order. I have resolved also to read them to Caesar. If only fortune is kind, he may show new interest, perhaps you also will be there. If not, I shall fix a day at another time, so that we can look over the work together. In fact I could not show this writing to him without first consulting you, if only that could be done without risk, so that you may realise that you are not being neglected.

Farewell, dearest Paul.]

¹⁶⁰ Cicero *Ad Atticum* II. 19. 5

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44.

¹⁶³ *Acts of Paul* 11. 5 (Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 'The Acts of Paul' in *New Testament Apocrypha* II, [1992], p. 262).

¹⁶⁴ Schneemelcher, 'The Acts of Paul' in *New Testament Apocrypha* II, (1992), p. 230.

Epistle III, from S to P, refers to S's writings on Christian subjects.¹⁶⁵ S intends to read these works to the emperor and hopes that P will also be present. There is a hint of danger in this proposal, a suggestion that Nero might no longer be interested. Loss of interest presumably meant loss of sympathy.

IV

Annaeo Senecae Paulus salutem.

Quotiescumque litteras tuas audio, praesentiam tui cogito nec aliud existimo quam omni tempore te nobiscum esse. Cum primum itaque uenire coeperis, inuicem nos et de proximo uidebimus. Bene te ualere opto.

[To Annaeus Seneca, a greeting from Paul,

Whenever I hear your letters read, I imagine that you are present, and think only that you are always with us. As soon as you set out, then, we shall see each other in person. I wish you good health.]

Ep. IV does not appear to be a reply to III, nor does it logically precede *Ep.* V. It seems to expect that S is about to set out for P's location, wherever that is, yet in *Ep.* V it is P who is expected in Rome.

V

Seneca Paulo salutem.

Nimio tuo secessu angimur. Quid est? Quae te res remotum faciunt? Si indignatio dominae, quod a ritu et secta ueteri recesseris et aliorum conuerteris, erit postulandi locus ut ratione factum non leuitate hoc existimet. Bene uale.

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion on whether the *uolumina* in question are his own or works of Paul, see Barlow, (ed) *Epistolae*, pp. 37-38 and *Ep.* IX. 3 with note, p. 131. For the view that St. Paul's letters are meant, see Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 174.

[To Paul, a greeting from Seneca,

We are hurt by your very long retirement. What is wrong? What keeps you away? If it is my lady's anger, because you have deserted your previous rites and way of life, and have turned to another, there will be an opportunity of convincing her, that it was done after due reflection and not frivolously. A kind farewell.]

The fifth letter purports to be from Seneca to Paul and gives the impression of following immediately after *Ep.* III. The third letter gives the impression that P's arrival is imminent; *Ep.* V expresses surprise that he has not yet appeared. If he is concerned about the attitude of the *domina* there will be an opportunity to explain his position. This is one of several references in the letters that require some historical knowledge on the part of the reader. Presumably these would have had to be explained to an ill-educated audience. It is doubtful, for example, that such an audience would immediately recognise the *domina* of *Ep.* V and *Ep.* VIII.¹⁶⁶ It would perhaps be obvious that *domina* referred to Nero's wife, but not so clear which wife was meant.

If Barlow's thesis is accepted, that the letters are the result of a rhetorical assignment, then the intended readers/listeners, the writer's peers and their instructor, would presumably have had little trouble with the allusions. Once the letters entered the wider Christian community, however, some degree of commentary must have become necessary. Even if the letters were not originally intended to tell a story it is apparent that they could have been used to do so.

The *domina* in question is Nero's wife, Poppaea. There are several interesting points here. Once again there is the explicit assumption that P had access to the emperor's household, that Poppaea was acquainted with him and would have enough interest to be annoyed that he has deserted Judaism. There is the reference to Poppaea's alleged sympathy towards the Jews also attested elsewhere.¹⁶⁷ It appears that this tradition of the empress' interest in Judaism was known to

¹⁶⁶ She is thought to have been Poppaea (Barlow [ed.], *Epistolae*, p. 141, note 1).

¹⁶⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities* XX. 195, *Vita* 16.

fourth-century Christian circles in Rome. Her sympathy, however, was not sufficient to prevent Jews from being caught up in the persecution following the fire.¹⁶⁸

Our author knew his history, at least as it touched Christians. He also knew of Seneca as both philosopher and *amicus Neronis*, had perhaps studied his works. He was aware that Seneca and St. Paul were close contemporaries. This information could not have been gained from Jerome's *De uiris illustribus*, since that work post-dates the letters. He knew of Poppaea's supposed sympathy for Judaism. He claims that Jews as well as Christians were punished in the aftermath of the fire.

This letter makes it clear to its readers and its listeners that P has abandoned Judaism and converted to Christianity: *quod a ritu et secta ueteri recesseris et aliorum conuerteris*.¹⁶⁹ He is no longer to be thought of as a Jew or even a Jewish-Christian. He has broken with his former allegiance and is now definitely Christian.

VI

Senecae st Lucilio Paulus salutem.

De his quae mihi scripsisti non licet arundine et atramento eloqui, quarum altera res notat et designat aliquid, altera euidenter ostendit, praecipue cum sciam inter uos esse, hoc est apud uos et in uobis, qui me intellegant. Honor omnibus habendus est, tanto magis quanto indignandi occasionem captant. Quibus si patientiam demus, omni modo eos et quaqua parte vincemus, si modo hi sunt qui poenitentiam sui gerant. Bene ualete.

[To Seneca and Lucilius, a greeting from Paul,

On the matter about which you have written I must not speak with pen and ink; the former marks out and defines it and the latter shows it clearly, especially as I know that that there are some with you, that is, with you and amongst you, who understand me. Respect must be shown to all, the more so because people take the opportunity to be offended. If we are patient we shall

¹⁶⁸ See below.

¹⁶⁹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. V.

certainly overcome them on every point, provided that they can be sorry for their actions. A kind farewell.]

Ep. VI is from P, addressed to both S and Lucilius, the correspondent of Seneca's genuine letters. The letter is almost Delphic in its obscurity. It could be a warning to S to be wary of what he includes in his *uolumina* mentioned in *Ep.* III. This interpretation is supported by *Ep.* VIII in which P rebukes S for reading various, obviously Christian, writings to Nero.¹⁷⁰ P then goes on to advise *honor omnibus habendus est*. It is not clear to whom *omnibus* refers. Perhaps it is Nero and Poppaea and their *familiares* to whom respect must be shown and who will be won over by patience, provided they repent their former way of life. Alternatively P might be repeating his concern of *Ep.* II, that the letter could fall into the wrong hands. It is unnecessary to write in dangerous detail *cum sciam inter uos esse, hoc est apud uos et in uobis, qui me intellegant*.

VII

*Annaeus Seneca Paulo et Theophilo salutem*¹⁷¹

Profiteor bene me acceptum lectione litterarum tuarum quae Galatis Corinthiis Achaeis misisti, et ita inuicem uiuamus, ut etiam cum horrore diuino eas exhibes. Spiritus enim sanctus in te et super excelsos sublimi ore satis uenerabiles sensus exprimit. Vellem itaque, cum res eximias proferas, ut maiestati earum cultus sermonis non desit. Et ne quid tibi. frater, subripiam aut conscientiae meae debeam, confiteor Augustum sensibus tuis motum. Cui perlecto uirtutis in te exordio, ista uox fuit: mirari eum posse ut qui non legitime imbutus sit taliter sentiat. Cui ego respondi solere deos ore innocentium effari, haut eorum qui praeuaricare doctrina sua quid possint. Et dato ei exemplo Vatienti hominis rusticuli, cui uiri duo adparuerunt in agro Reatino, qui postea Castor et Pollux sunt nominati, satis instructus uidetur. Valete.

¹⁷⁰ See discussion on *Ep.* VIII below.

¹⁷¹ See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 99; Römer, 'The Correspondence between Seneca and Paul' in *New Testament Apocrypha* II, [1992], p. 52, note 7.

[To Paul and Theophilus, a greeting from Seneca

I admit that I was pleased to read the letters you sent to the Galatians, Corinthians and Achaean; and may we each live inspired by that religious awe as you show yourself to be. For the holy spirit in you and high above you expresses these exalted and honoured thoughts in lofty speech. I would therefore have you take care of other factors, that your style may be equal to the majesty of the thought. And, my brother, so that I do not conceal anything from you and have it on my conscience, I confess that Augustus was moved by your views. When the introductory section on the power that is in you was read to him, his words were as follows: he wondered that a man with an irregular education was able to understand such matters. I replied that the gods often speak through the mouth of the unworldly, not through those who make deceitful parade of their learning. He seemed to be convinced when I cited the example of the farmer Vatienus to whom two men appeared in the territory of Reate, who were later recognised as Castor and Pollux. Farewell.]

In *Ep. VII S* once again praises Paul for the lofty thoughts expressed in three of his letters addressed to the Galatians, Corinthians and Achaean.¹⁷² It is a pity, chides S, that the language in which such ideas are expressed does not match the majesty of the ideas themselves. Here, centuries after Seneca's death, there is still the feeling that the oratorical and literary style reveals the man.¹⁷³ Paul himself in a genuine letter admits that he is ἰδιώτης τῶ λόγῳ.¹⁷⁴ The emperor, according to S, is impressed and wonders that one *non legitime imbutus* should be capable of such sentiments. St. Augustine would provide the answer. Paul possessed the eloquence of the inspired.¹⁷⁵ Our anonymous author does not, however, use this argument. He has S cite an example from legendary history that Seneca could be expected to have used; an example that Nero might have appreciated.

¹⁷² For the identification of the third letter mentioned, see Römer, 'The Correspondence between Seneca and Paul,' p. 52, n. 8 and Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 142, note 1.

¹⁷³ See p. 87 below.

¹⁷⁴ II Cor. xi. 6.

¹⁷⁵ St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* IV.vii.11. Augustine precedes this claim with a lengthy justification (*De doctrina christiana* IV.vi. 9-vii. 10).

One of the more remarkable aspects of the correspondence is the positive view of Nero expressed in this letter. That emperor is more usually regarded in Christian tradition with a mixture of terror and horror. He is the personification of evil, the beast of the apocalypse.

Thus far the outlook of the correspondence has been generally optimistic. Christians in Rome are able to meet safely in public places to discuss their texts (*Ep. I*). Seneca, the most powerful man of the time, *amicus principis* and philosopher, is an active sympathiser, perhaps even a secret convert, treating Paul as his equal. The implication of Paul's high status also appears in Acts 28. 16 and 30. He is portrayed as staying in his own accommodation, perhaps rented or as the guest of a friend, and under minimum guard.¹⁷⁶

P has access to the imperial household and the emperor himself shows interest in his teachings. The only problem is posed by the *domina* who is sympathetic to Judaism and is perhaps unlikely to understand P's desertion of his ancestral faith. This positive attitude changes in *Ep. VIII*.

VIII

Senecae Paulus salutem.

Licet non ignorem Caesarem nostrum rerum admirandarum, si quando deficiet, amatorem esse, permittet tamen se non laedi, sed admoneri. Puto enim te grauiter fecisse, quod ei in notitiam perferre uoluisti quod ritui et disciplinae eius sit contrarium. Cum enim ille gentium deos colat, quid tibi uisum sit ut hoc scire eum uelles non uideo, nisi nimio amore meo facere te hoc existimo. Rogo de futuro ne id agas. Cauendum est enim ne, dum me diligis, offensum dominae facias, cuius quidem offensa neque oberit, si perseuerauerit, neque, si non sit, proderit; si est regina, non indignabitur, si mulier est, offendetur. Bene uale.

[To Seneca, a greeting from Paul

Although I am aware that our Caesar is fond of wonders, if ever he is lacking (in understanding) he will allow himself to be advised, but not annoyed. I think you made a serious error by wishing

¹⁷⁶ Hermann Lichtenberger, 'Jews and Christians in Rome in the Time of Nero: Josephus and Paul in Rome,' *ANRW* II. 26.3 (1996), p. 2151.

to bring to his attention that which is contrary to his custom and training. Since he worships the gods of the pagans I do not see what you had in mind in wanting him to know this, unless I am to think that you did it from your great affection for me. I beg you not to do this in the future. You must of course take care not to offend the empress, while showing esteem for me. It is true that her displeasure will not harm us if it lasts, nor help if it does not. If she behaves like a queen she will not be displeased, if she behaves like a woman she will take offence. A kind farewell.]

The text of *Ep.* VIII is even more uncertain than that of the other letters.¹⁷⁷ The message, however, is quite clear. It is useless and potentially dangerous to preach the new religion to Nero. Implicit in the opening sentence is the transient nature of that emperor's enthusiasms.¹⁷⁸ It is unwise to lecture him on his way of life; he worships the old gods and will not change. The P of these letters believes that there can only be danger in attracting the attention of the imperial court. Here the attitude differs from that of the various Acts of the Apostles, both canonical and apocryphal. In these texts the apostle concerned takes every opportunity to preach, especially to the powerful. In the case of this correspondence readers and listeners are expected to fill in the gaps for themselves, and others. If Nero had not known of the Christians perhaps they would not have been condemned as arsonists when he needed scapegoats to divert suspicion from himself. The danger of offending the empress is stated explicitly. Once again readers have to supply possible reasons. Poppaea might be prepared to persecute Christians in general and P in particular because of her supposed sympathy towards Judaism, the religion P has rejected. There is also the possibility that she would be prepared to sacrifice Christians in order to protect Jews. P fears that S is acting out of affection for himself. There is no expectation that S should promote the Christian message at Court. This attitude changes in *Ep.* XIV.

¹⁷⁷ Römer, 'The Correspondence between Seneca and Paul,' p. 47; Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 143.

¹⁷⁸ *licet non ignorem Caesarem nostrum rerum admirandarum, si quando deficiet, amatorem esse...* (*Ep.* VIII. 2: from P to S).

IX

Seneca Paulo salutem.

Scio te non tam tui causa commotum litteris quas ad te de editione epistolarum mearum Caesari feci quam natura rerum, quae ita mentes hominum ab omnibus artibus et moribus rectis reuocat, ut non hodie admirer, quippe ut is qui multis documentis hoc iam notissimum habeam. Igitur noue agamus, et si quid facile in praeteritum factum est, ueniam inrogabis. Misi tibi librum de uerborum copia. Vale Paule carissime.

[To Paul, a greeting from Seneca.

I know that it was not so much for your own sake that that you were disturbed when I wrote to you that that I had read my letters to Caesar, as by the nature of things that retards the minds of men from all upright pursuits and practices. I am not surprised today because I have learnt this well from many examples. Therefore let us begin again and if in the past I have been negligent, you will pardon me. I have sent you a book on elegance of expression. Farewell, my very dear Paul.]

The ninth letter in Barlow's sequence appears to be S's reply to P's *Ep.* VIII. S apologises to P for reading "my letters" to Nero. In *Ep.* VII he referred to *litteras tuas quas Galatis Corinthiis Achaeis misisti* and the obvious assumption is that these are the works he read to the emperor. Römer¹⁷⁹ and Kurfess¹⁸⁰ appear to accept this interpretation. Both have S refer to "your letters," that he has read to Caesar. Barlow defends his interpretation on several grounds.¹⁸¹ Nowhere is it clearly stated that it is Paul's writing that S reads to Nero. The *uolumina* of *Ep.* III appear to be Seneca's rather than Paul's.¹⁸² S claims in *Ep.* VII to have read Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Galatians and Achaeans. What he shows to Nero, however, is *uirtutis in te exordium*.¹⁸³ Barlow

¹⁷⁹ Römer, 'The Correspondence between Paul and Seneca,' p. 50.

¹⁸⁰ A. Kurfess, 'The Apocryphal Correspondence between Seneca and Paul,' trans. George Ogg, in *New Testament Apocrypha* II, [1975], p. 137.

¹⁸¹ See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* VII and p. 38.

akes this to be S's own writing in praise of Paul and Christianity, not a work of Paul's in praise of virtue, such as *I Corinthians* 13.¹⁸⁴

S concludes the letter by promising to send P *librum de uerborum copia*.¹⁸⁵ This book is intended to enable P to express his noble sentiments in the Latin rhetorical style befitting them.

Our author makes no attempt to differentiate P from S by using a different style for each, nor does he try to imitate Seneca's style. It is probable that he lacked the sophisticated literary skills required for such a task, but it is also possible that he was acquainted with Seneca's work only in abbreviated form, an epitome of *De remediis fortuitorum*, for example.¹⁸⁶

Epp. X to XIV are dated by naming the consuls. These names are correct, except for minor differences that are almost certainly due to scribal errors.¹⁸⁷ This was a common Roman method of indicating the year. It is, however, unusual to find a letter dated in this fashion; it is more often assumed that the correspondent is aware of who the consuls are, and therefore what year it is.¹⁸⁸ Cicero includes the consuls' names on occasion, but not always for the purpose of indicating the year. In a letter to his friend, Atticus, Cicero includes the names of the consuls elect.¹⁸⁹ The letter announces the birth of his son. The inclusion of the consuls' names may be to add a note of mock solemnity to the birth notice.¹⁹⁰ In other letters Cicero sometimes includes the consular names at the beginning of the year, for example *Ad Atticum* I.13, dated January 25, 61 B.C., or *Ad Atticum* I. 18, dated January 20, 60 B.C.

The author of the apocryphal correspondence included the consular dating in an attempt to add a touch of authenticity to his fiction. They indicate a written source to which he had access,

¹⁸⁴ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 38.

¹⁸⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. IX and p. 144, note 1.

¹⁸⁶ See Robert J. Newman, 'Lucii Annaei Senecae *De remediis fortuitorum* liber ad Gallionem fratrem, PhD, the Johns Hopkins University, 1984, p. 109 for evidence that an epitome of *De remediis* existed in the anonymous author's time.

¹⁸⁷ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 145-146, note 1

¹⁸⁸ I am indebted to D. H. Kelly for this observation.

¹⁸⁹ *Ad Atticum* I. 2, dated to the middle of 65 B.C.

¹⁹⁰ Cicero, *Selected Letters*, D. R. Shackleton Bailey (trans.), p. 30, note 18.

whether official or unofficial. It is unlikely that oral tradition would have preserved such details over three centuries, although it is possible.

According to the consular names *Ep.* X in Barlow's sequence of the Senecan/Pauline correspondence is dated to June 27, 58; *Ep.* XI to March 28, 64; *Ep.* XII to March 23, 59; *Ep.* XIII to July 6, 58 and *Ep.* XIV to August 1, 58.¹⁹¹ It can readily be seen that the letters are not in chronological order. Barlow has nevertheless decided to accept the order of the majority of manuscripts.¹⁹²

X

Senecae Paulus salutem.

Quotienscumque tibi scribo et nomen meum subsecundo, grauem sectae meae et incongruentem rem facio. Debeo enim, ut saepe professus sum, cum omnibus omnia esse et id obseruare in tuam personam quod lex Romana honori senatus concessit, perlecta epistola ultimum locum eligere, ne cum aporia et dedecore cupiam efficere quod mei arbitrii fuerit. Vale deuotissime magister. Data V Kal. Iul. Nerone III et Messala consulibus.

[To Seneca, a greeting from Paul.

Whenever I write to you and place my name after yours, I commit a serious fault and one that is incompatible with my way of life. For I ought, as I have often claimed, to be all things to all men and to observe towards you that which Roman law has granted to the honour of the senate, that is, to choose the last place in my completed letter, lest I desire to accomplish in an inadequate and disgraceful way what is under my own control. Farewell, most dedicated of teachers. Written on the 27th of June in the consulship of Nero (for the third time), and of Messala.]

¹⁹¹ Barlow (ed.) *Epistolae*, pp. 83, 145-146, note 1.

¹⁹² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 87-88.

In *Ep. X*, from P to S, P defers to S. That is the impression that is given, although the letter itself is difficult to interpret.¹⁹³ The clearest sentiment occurs in the final sentence: *uale deuotissime magister*. This is another step in the Romanisation of the Greek-speaking Jewish apostle of Christianity, the acceptance of the Roman Seneca as his teacher.¹⁹⁴ One would have expected the reverse to be case, the acceptance by the pagan senator of the Christian apostle as his instructor in Christianity. It is interesting that the letter writer is more concerned with Romanising St. Paul than in Christianising Seneca. More than a thousand years later, in a Christian society, Seneca would be depicted as a Christian saint and martyr.¹⁹⁵

These letters perhaps mark the beginning of the Romanisation of the apostle to the Gentiles. Tajra claims that the *Passio Sancti Pauli Apostoli* is a milestone in the development of the legends surrounding Paul in that it marks “a clear Romanization of the original story of Paul’s death.”¹⁹⁶ The fictitious correspondence Romanises St. Paul’s life.

XI

Seneca Paulo salutem.

Ave mi Paule carissime. Putasne me haut contristari et non luctuosum esse quod de innocentia uestra subinde supplicium sumatur? Dehine quod tam duros tamque obnoxios uos reatui omnis populus iudicet, putans a uobis effici quicquid in urbe contrarium fit? Sed feramus aequo animo et utamur foro sors concessit, donec inuicta felicitas finem malis imponat. Tulit et priscorum aetas Macedonem, Philippi filium, Cyros Darium Dionysium, nostra quoque Gaium Caesarem, quibus quicquid libuit licuit. Incendium urbs Romana manifeste saepe unde patiatur constat. Sed si effari humilitas humana potuisset quid causae sit et impune in his tenebris loqui liceret, iam omnes omnia uiderent. Christiani et Iudaei quasi machinatores incendii – pro! – supplicio adfecti, quod fieri solet. Grassator iste quisquis est, cui uoluptas canificini est et mendacium uelamentum, tempori suo destinatus est, et ut optimus quisque unum pro multis datum est caput, ita et hic deuotus pro omnibus igni cremabitur. Centum triginta duae domus,

¹⁹³ For further discussion see Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 144, note 2.

¹⁹⁴ Presumably of Latin rhetoric, although the restriction is implicit rather than explicit.

¹⁹⁵ See frontispiece.

¹⁹⁶ Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 139.

insulae quattuor milia sex diebus arsere; septimus pausam dedit. Bene te ualere, frater opto. Data V Kal. Apr. Frugi et Basso consulibus.

[To Paul, a greeting from Seneca.

Greetings, my dearly beloved Paul. Do you think that I am not distressed and grieving because punishment is always being exacted from you innocent people? Or because the whole populace condemns you as callous and likely to be guilty, thinking that every misfortune in Rome is due to you? But let us endure it calmly and take advantage of whatever fate offers us, until unconquerable joy assigns an end to (present) evil. Earlier ages endured the Macedonian, son of Philip, the Cyruses, Darius, Dionysius, our own has endured Gaius Caesar, each of whom was free to do whatever he wished. The source of the frequent fires that Rome suffers is clear. But if humble people could have told the reason, and if it were permitted to speak freely in these dark times, everyone would now understand everything. Christians and Jews, as if they were responsible for the fire, alas, are being put to death, as is usually the case. That ruffian, whoever he is, whose pleasure is murdering and whose refuge is lying, is marked down for his time of reckoning, and just as the best is sacrificed as one life for many, so he will be sacrificed for all and burned by fire. One hundred and thirty-two houses and four thousand apartment blocks burned in six days; the seventh day gave a respite. I hope that you are in good health, brother. Written on the 28th of March in the consulship of Frugi and Bassus.]

Ep. XI is the only letter in the collection that deals with an historical event. That event is the fire of Rome in A.D. 64. The letter gives details that are not present in other sources.¹⁹⁷ According to our author, one hundred and thirty-two *domus* and four thousand *insulae* were destroyed in six days.¹⁹⁸ Care must be taken with ancient numbers, even more than with modern statistics. The quoting of an exact number can bestow an undeserved air of authority. Even bearing this in mind, there seems no reason to disagree with Barlow's contention that the author of this correspondence had access to sources now lost, especially in view of the accuracy of the consuls'

¹⁹⁷ Römer, 'The Correspondence between Paul and Seneca,' p. 46.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* XV.41; Suetonius, *Nero* XXXVIII; also Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 147, note 1.

names in the last five letters.¹⁹⁹ It is not necessary to assume that the numbers he reports are accurate counts. Their importance lies in the possibility that they were recorded, officially or unofficially, and that he had access to these records.²⁰⁰ An unofficial record could be a tradition, whether written or oral, preserved by the Christians of Rome.

The author of the letters adds another detail not mentioned in the account of either Tacitus or Suetonius, that Jews were also condemned as arsonists and persecuted with the Christians. The coupling of Jews and Christians here is odd since the correspondence has been at some pains to separate Paul from Judaism. Elliott suggests that this letter, on the basis of its style, seems not to belong with the others.²⁰¹ Barlow advances the possibility that the correspondence could be the work of two or more authors, writing at the same time.²⁰² This explanation accounts for various inconsistencies in the letters, including an apparent difference in attitude towards Judaism.

This detail lends weight to the hypothesis that the author had access to some sort of record of the fire and its aftermath. It is of course possible that the letter writer made up this detail because he believed that it added credibility to his work. For the purpose of the present argument it does not matter whether he found this information or whether he invented it. The important point is that although he was writing towards the end of the fourth century, he believed that Jews had been caught up with Christians and that the authorities could not have differentiated between them, or made no effort to do so. He believed also that his audience would find this credible. It is unlikely that either Nero or the officials charged with seeking out those accused of responsibility for the fire had any interest in sorting the Jewish sheep from the Christian goats. Nero needed scapegoats and he needed them quickly. The supposed sympathy at the imperial court for the Jews rests on slender foundations.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 83, 145-146, note 1. Fürst, on the other hand believes that this number cannot be regarded as historical, but “gehört zu den Techniken der Pseudepigraphie,” (‘Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität,’ *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 41[1998], p. 87).

²⁰⁰ In spite of Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 41. 1: *domuum et insularum et templorum quae amissa sunt numerum inire haud promptum fuerit.*

²⁰¹ He casts doubt also on *Epp.* XIII and XIV (Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 547).

²⁰² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 89 and 92.

²⁰³ See Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 83. The evidence that Tajra cites does not support the conclusion that, “it is clear that the Jews wielded considerable influence at court.”

Anonymous uses *Iudaeus* here, a word that to Christians of his day could carry negative overtones,²⁰⁴ although it is clear that no negative connotation is intended. In fact the reverse is the case. Both *Christiani* and *Iudaei* are unjustly condemned and *grassator iste*, who is obviously Nero, will be punished for the murder of Christian and Jew alike.²⁰⁵

The letter writer reveals that he does not accept the tradition of Paul's martyrdom in 62. According to the correspondence Paul had not yet arrived in Rome in the first quarter of 64. The letter is composed as if it had been written during the persecution of Christians after the fire and the fire, according to these letters, was extinguished by 28th March.²⁰⁶

This is contrary to Tacitus' dating of the outbreak of the fire to 19th July.²⁰⁷ It is difficult to believe that Tacitus would have been mistaken in the dating of the fire. When he wrote the fire was still within living memory. Tacitus himself was perhaps seven or eight years old at the time of the disaster and could have had his own memories even if he had not been in Rome. The heat of summer is also a more likely time than the milder weather of March. Political expediency would dictate that the supposed arsonists be punished for their crime as soon as possible in order to satisfy the popular desire for revenge and, more importantly in Nero's eyes, to deflect suspicion from himself.

There is another point worthy of note in these letters. It is nowhere inferred that Paul is coming to Rome under duress. In fact the contrary is the case. *Epistle V* asks him if he delays because of a reluctance to face the *domina*. There is no suggestion that Paul must keep to the timetable of an official escort. This raises some interesting points about the author's tradition. Was he ignorant of Acts 27-28.16, that describes Paul's journey to Rome under military guard, or did he not accept it? There are troubling, if minor, inconsistencies in the account in Acts. On Paul's arrival in Puteoli he and his party found "brethren" who invited them to stay for seven

²⁰⁴ R. W. Barnes, personal communication.

²⁰⁵ See Fürst, 'Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität,' p. 84, and *Ep. XIV* below.

²⁰⁶ See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 145, note 1 and p. 147, note 1.

²⁰⁷ Tacitus, *Annals XV. 41*; Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 145, note 1 and p. 147, note 1.

days.²⁰⁸ There is no mention of the military escort or what that escort's opinion might have been about yet another delay on the journey when it was so close to its goal.

There is another possible explanation. The group to which our author belonged might have followed a tradition that had Paul released from custody, with or without trial, as suggested by Tajra.²⁰⁹ Paul then left Rome, perhaps to undertake a proposed missionary journey to Spain, and he was now returning. Some such tradition would account for the original meeting with Seneca. Paul could have used the time he spent in Rome (two years, according to Acts 28. 30) making contacts and even converts at the highest level. If the author of the letters had inherited some such tradition it is understandable that *Ep. I* reads as if it is part of an established correspondence. An earlier two-year sojourn in Rome, as described in Acts 28. 30-31, also gave Paul an opportunity to gain access to the Imperial court, to impress Nero, even if briefly, and to offend Poppaea by making it clear that he no longer followed Judaism.

This letter also indicates that the author was not familiar with Tacitus' account of the fire or perhaps ignored it.²¹⁰ According to his dating, *V Kal. Apr. Frugi et Basso Consulibus*,²¹¹ the fire occurred before March 28th, 64.²¹² Tacitus dates the first outbreak to the night of July 18th to 19th, 64.²¹³ It burned for seven nights and six days before a six-day respite.²¹⁴ It flared up again and burned for a further three days.²¹⁵ Given that of the fourteen urban districts three were completely destroyed, seven were reduced to scorched ruins and only four were untouched, the terror of the populace and the furious determination that those responsible should be punished becomes understandable.²¹⁶

²⁰⁸ Acts 28. 14-15; Herman Lichtenberger, 'Jews and Christians in Rome in the Time of Nero: Josephus and Paul in Rome,' *ANRW* II. 26. 3 (1996), p. 2151.

²⁰⁹ See Appendix II.

²¹⁰ See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 83 for a contrary view.

²¹¹ *Ep. XI*.

²¹² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 147, note 1.

²¹³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 147, note 1; Lichtenberger, 'Jews and Christians in Rome,' p. 2169.

²¹⁴ Lichtenberger, 'Jews and Christians in Rome', p. 2169.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 40.

There is also a touch of the genuine Seneca in this letter. Romans were fond of *exempla* and it is no surprise to have Nero compared with past autocrats. To find Alexander the Great included is unusual. He is more often admired as a great general than reviled as a tyrant. Seneca, however, criticised him as a mass murderer.²¹⁷

The portrayal of Nero has altered from the earlier letters. He is now the target of abuse as “that ruffian, whoever he is, whose pleasure is murdering and whose refuge is lying, is marked for his time of reckoning, and just as one good man gave his life for many, so he shall be sacrificed for all and burned by fire.”²¹⁸ Despite the qualification of *iste quisquis est* there can be no doubt of the identity of *grassator*, especially in view of the comparison with previous tyrants, including the Emperor Gaius, who served Seneca as the paradigm of terror. This letter thus provides a hint that the author might have read at least some of Seneca’s work, despite the fact that he has made no attempt to imitate his style. Judging from the evidence of the correspondence it is doubtful that its author had the skill to do so. There is, however, another possible explanation. The author’s knowledge of Seneca’s thought could have been gleaned from epitomes.²¹⁹

XII

Seneca ad Paulum salutem.

Aue mi Paule carissime. Si mihi nominique meo uir tantus et a Deo dilectus omnibus modis, non dico fueris iunctus, sed necessario mixtus, optime actum erit de Seneca tuo. Cum sis igitur uertex et altissimorum omnium montium cacumen, non ergo uis laeter, si ita sim tibi proximus ut alter similis tui deputer? Haut itaque te indignum prima facie epistolarum nominandum censeas, ne temptare me quam laudare uidearis, quippe cum scias te ciuem esse Romanum. Nam qui meus tuus apud te locus, qui tuus uelim ut meus. Vale mi Paule carissime. Data X Kal. Apri. Aproniano et Capitone consulibus.

²¹⁷ See below, p. 143.

²¹⁸ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. XI*, p. 147.

²¹⁹ See p. 70 with note 186 above.

[To Paul, a greeting from Seneca

Greetings, my dearly beloved Paul. If so great a man as you and one beloved of God is to be, I do not say united, but closely associated in all respects with me and my name, then your Seneca will be completely satisfied. Since, therefore, you are the peak and crest of all the loftiest mountains, do you not, therefore, want me to be happy if I am so close to you as to be considered your second self. Therefore I do not think that you are unworthy of having your name in first place in your letters, or else you may seem to be tempting me rather than praising me, especially when you know that you are a Roman citizen. For I wish that my position were yours and that yours was as mine. Farewell, my dearly beloved Paul. Written on the 23rd of March in the consulship of Apronianus and Capito.]

The twelfth letter in the series is S's reply to *Ep. X* written by P. S modestly rejects P's deference. It is he who feels honoured by P's friendship. P is *uir tantus et a Deo dilectus*. He reminds P, and of course his readers and listeners, that Paul is a Roman citizen.²²⁰ Once again our author displays an understanding of Roman history. He is aware that in the first century Roman citizenship was a comparatively rare prize. The information could, of course, have come from a Christian source. The canonical Acts of the Apostles makes much of Paul's status as Roman citizen, especially since he claimed to be one by right of birth.²²¹

XIII

Seneca Paulo salutem.

Allegrice et aenigmaticice multa a te usquequaque opera colliduntur et ideo rerum tantauis et muneris tibi tributa non ornamento uerborum, sed cultu quodam decoranda est. Nec uereare, quod saepius dixisse retineo, multos qui talia adfectent sensus corrumpere, rerum uirtutes euirare. Certum mihi uelim concedas latinitati morem gerere, honestis uocibus et speciem adhibere, ut generosi muneris concessio digne a te possit expediri. Bene uale. Data pridie Non. Iul. Lurcone et Sabino consulibus.

²²⁰ Lentz has examined the likelihood of Paul's being a Roman citizen (Lentz, *Luke's Portrait of Paul*, pp. 48f, 59f). Paul's citizenship status (or lack of it) is unimportant for the purposes of the present discussion. The important point here is that the letter writer believes Paul to have been a Roman citizen.

²²¹ Acts 22. 25-29.

[To Paul, a greeting from Seneca

Many works composed by you are throughout allegorical and enigmatic, and for that reason you must beautify that powerful gift of truth and talent that has been bestowed upon you, not so much with elegant words as with a certain amount of refinement. And do not fear, as I remember I have frequently said, that many who affect such things spoil the thoughts and emasculate the strength of their subject matter. I do wish that you would yield to me and comply with the pure Latin style to give a good appearance to your noble words, in order that the granting of the great gift that has been bestowed on you may be worthily treated by you. A kind farewell. Written on July the sixth in the consulship of Lurco and Sabinus.]

The whole of *Ep.* XIII is devoted to the task of convincing P of the importance of improving his Latin style. The profound truths he has to impart should be expressed in refined language.²²² It is as if the mention of Paul's status as a Roman citizen in the previous letter has reminded the writer that he has been neglecting the matter of P's poor Latin since *Ep.* IX. St. Paul's claims to have no rhetorical expertise may be no more than 'rhetorical modesty.'²²³ Most of the church fathers, however, agreed with Paul's own assessment of his lack of skill,²²⁴ although Augustine thought that his inspiration lent him an eloquence that sometimes corresponded to classical rules.²²⁵

XIV

Paulus Senecae salutem.

Perpendenti tibi ea sunt reuelata quae paucis diuinitas concessit. Certus igitur ego in agro iam fertili semen fortissimum sero, non quidem materiam quae corrumpi uidetur, sed uerbum stabile Dei, deriuamentum crescentis et manentis in aeternum. Quod

²²² See Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 90 with note 1, and p. 91.

²²³ 1 Cor. 2. 1-5; 2 Cor. 11. 6. See also E. A. Judge, 'Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice,' *Australian Biblical Review* 16 (1968), p. 37f.

²²⁴ Abraham J. Malherbe, 'Seneca on Paul as Letter Writer,' in Birger A. Pearson (ed), *The Future of Early Christianity. Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester*, A. Pearson (ed), in collaboration with A. Thomas Kraabel, George W. E. Nickelsburg, Norman R. Petersen, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 414.

²²⁵ St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* IV. vii. 11.

prudencia tua adsecuta indeficiens fore debbit, ethnicorum Israhelitarumque obseruationes censere uitandas. Nouum te auctorem feceris Christi Iesu, praeconiis ostendendo rethoricis inreprehensibilem sophiam, quam propemodum adeptus regi temporali eiusque domesticis atque fidis amicis insinuabis, quibus aspera et incapabilis erit persuasio, cum plerique illorum minime flectuntur insinuationibus tuis. Quibus uitale commodum sermo Dei instillatus nouum hominem sine corruptela perpetuum animal parit ad Deum istinc properantem. Vale Seneca carissime nobis. Data Kal. Aug. Lurcone et Sabino consulibus.

[To Seneca, a greeting from Paul

Matters have been revealed to you in your reflections that the Divinity has granted to few. Therefore I am certain that I am sowing a rich seed in a fertile field, not corruptible matter, but the abiding word of God, derived from Him who is ever-increasing and ever-abiding. The determination that your good sense has attained must never fail – namely, to avoid the outward manifestations of the heathen and the Israelites. You must make yourself a new herald of Jesus Christ by displaying with the praises of rhetoric that blameless wisdom that you have almost achieved and that you will present to the temporal king and to the members of his household and to his trusted friends, whom you will find difficult or nearly impossible to persuade, since many of them are not at all influenced by your presentations. Once the Word of God has inspired the blessing of life within them it will create a new man, without corruption, an abiding being, hastening thence to God. Farewell, Seneca, most dear to us. Written on the first of August in the consulship of Lurco and Sabinus.]

In *Ep.* VIII P chided S for preaching to the emperor and his court. In *Ep.* XIV he now encourages what he then deplored. S is to become a Christian missionary to the imperial court, although P acknowledges that there are many who will not heed his message. Despite this the attempt is still worthwhile. If P has been gradually Romanised throughout the series of letters it is now S's turn to be Christianised.²²⁶ It appears, however, that S has been touched by the Christian God even

²²⁶ This last letter in the collection is the only one that names *Christus Iesus*.

before making P's acquaintance. He is a *naturaliter Christianus*, to whom P has added the finishing touches.²²⁷ Thus even here S is shown as the more important figure.

It is possible that this letter reflects aspects of the situation in Rome in the author's own time. Salzman's study indicates that traditional aristocratic families were comparatively slow to convert.²²⁸ Could the *fidi amici* of *Ep. XIV* refer more to recalcitrant pagans in the Roman senate of his own day than to Nero's friends?²²⁹ Fourth-century emperors spent little time in Rome and trusted the senate to rule the city, a senate that was still largely pagan.²³⁰ Emperors had to take many factors apart from religious affiliation into account when making appointments.²³¹

There is a rare Senecan touch in *Ep. XIV*, although it is supplied by P rather than S. The writer has P commend S for avoiding the outward displays of both Judaism and paganism. The real Seneca has similar advice for Lucilius, the correspondent of his genuine letters. The badge of the true philosopher (believer) is worn internally. It is not demonstrated by outrageous behaviour or a slovenly appearance.²³² The advice in *Ep. XIV* of this correspondence is intended to show how Paul is distancing himself from his Jewish past. In contrast to *Ep. XI* the author employs the word *Israhelita*, a term with a more positive connotation than *Iudaeus*,²³³ despite the fact that the context in this letter is negative, *Israhelitus* being grouped with *ethnicus*. Fürst suggests that the author was trying to employ St. Paul's terminology, a terminology that he had not mastered partly because he was familiar with only a Latin translation of the Pauline letters.²³⁴

1. 13 Conclusion

The correspondence tells us nothing of either Paul or Seneca. It does reveal what one Latin-speaking Christian (our author) believed: there had been a friendship between Seneca and St. Paul and that Seneca was, at the least, sympathetic towards Christianity. Given the popularity of

²²⁷ See Chapter Six.

²²⁸ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*.

²²⁹ See Chapter 6. 4 below.

²³⁰ See p. 44 above and pp. 231-232, 243, Chapter 6. 5 and 6. 6 below.

²³¹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 106, 110, with note 12, p. 114.

²³² Seneca, *Ep. V. 2*.

²³³ See p. 75 above.

²³⁴ Fürst, 'Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität,' p. 84.

the correspondence it is also clear that there were many other Christians at the time who shared his belief. It is difficult to decide whether they were convinced before they read the letters, or, whether, like St. Jerome, they were persuaded by the correspondence.

Seneca is portrayed as a would-be Christian missionary to Nero's court. Whether deliberately or by accident, the anonymous author has mirrored in Christian terms the historical relationship between Seneca and Nero. At first the emperor appears to be receptive to Seneca's guidance. Historically this was the *quinquennium Neronis* when Seneca and Burrus provided good governance in Nero's name. In the world of the fictitious letters this period is represented by *Ep.* VII and, to a lesser extent, by *Ep.* XIV, both of which express the hope that the emperor and his court could be swayed by Christian teaching. This hope is extinguished in *Ep.* XI with the condemnation of Christian, and Jew, for arson. In the world of history the destruction of the period of good rule was more drawn out, beginning with the murder of Agrippina, whose death greatly diminished Seneca's influence, and concluding with the death of Burrus that effectively ended it.²³⁵

An interesting and unexpected aspect of the correspondence is its picture of the relationship between Seneca and St. Paul. A Christian would surely expect that the apostle to the Gentiles would be Seneca's tutor in Christianity. Instead we find that the Roman philosopher is St. Paul's *educator praeceptorque*, just as he had once been Nero's.²³⁶ Paul's Hellenised education, as well as his Jewish learning, are implied in the reference to P's 'irregular' education: ... *ut qui non legitime imbutus sit.*²³⁷

The letters reveal something, also, of their anonymous author, who began the tradition of a friendship between Seneca and St. Paul.²³⁸ Most obviously, he was a Latin-speaking Christian and regarded himself as Roman. He resembled Hermas in that he was an 'ordinary' Christian, rather than a member of the senatorial or equestrian aristocracy. He, or his family, is not to be included amongst the poorest of the poor; he had had at least an elementary education. He had

²³⁵ See Chapter 2. 3 below.

²³⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62.

²³⁷ *Ep.* VII. 10.

²³⁸ Fürst, 'Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität', p. 93.

probably progressed no further than the *grammaticus*, at least at the time the correspondence was composed. The grasp of the rudiments of rhetoric that are apparent in the letters could have been acquired at that level. There is no evidence to indicate whether he was a Christian by upbringing or an enthusiastic convert.

The intended audience for this correspondence seems to have been sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to fill in the various gaps, both for themselves and for other, less educated, brethren. They were obviously acquainted with Paul's genuine letters, although the fact that they were written in Greek is not alluded to. Perhaps that was simply assumed knowledge. It is probable that the anonymous author was acquainted only with a Latin translation, and at least possible that he believed that Paul had composed them in that language.²³⁹

There is no mention of other Christian writings. That is not surprising since the author took care to avoid anachronistic references to works that did not exist at the time the letters are set. His particular Christian group is Roman and Pauline. It wishes to distance itself from its Jewish origins. To that end it adopts Seneca as a convert, even suggesting that he was always Christian in inclination. Paul, a Greek-speaking Jew, shows him the way. In the process Seneca Romanises Paul.

The author's S is based on some knowledge of Seneca's life and career. Both are discussed in the next chapter, in order to identify those elements that might have proved attractive to Roman Christians. The author displays no clear evidence of familiarity with Seneca's works, although there are some hints, S's relationship with 'Lucilius,' for example. Needless to say, S's relationship with St. Paul and his sympathy towards Christianity are pure invention, and probably the invention of the author of this correspondence.

²³⁹ Fürst, 'Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität, p. 84.

CHAPTER TWO

Seneca. A Political Philosopher?

*Seneca ... professoria lingua.*¹

Chapter One demonstrates how the apocryphal correspondence consolidated Seneca's reputation as a personal friend of St. Paul and as a Christian sympathiser and perhaps more than sympathiser. The following brief investigation of Seneca's life and career is intended to disclose aspects of either, or both, which might have caused Roman Christians to 'adopt' Seneca. Christians in the fourth century knew at least the bare bones of Seneca's career. That much is plain from Jerome's brief entry in his *De uiris illustribus* and also from the letters composed by the anonymous author of the fictitious letters. Anonymous did not derive his information from Jerome, although they might well have used the same source or sources.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca the Younger began his official political career in the 30s A.D, possibly in 33, when he entered the quaestorship.² He was then about thirty-three years old. Various reasons have been suggested for this comparatively late start. One possibility is Seneca's poor state of health.³ As a young man, he tells us, he was so ill that he seriously contemplated ending his life in order to end his suffering.⁴ Only the thought of his father's grief caused him to decide against suicide.⁵ Seneca believed that his study of philosophy helped him to overcome this and various other ailments:

*Studia mihi nostra saluti fuerunt. Philosophiae acceptum fero, quod surrexi, quod conualui.*⁶

Unfortunately he tells us little else about the medical treatment he received. It is probably to this period that the trip to Egypt belongs. The climate of Egypt, as well as the long sea-voyage, was thought to be beneficial to those suffering from various health problems.⁷

¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 14.

² Anna Lydia Motto, *Seneca*, New York: Twayne, 1973, p. 19.

³ Seneca suffered from asthma (Seneca, *Ep.* LIV. 1-4, 6) and possibly also tuberculosis.

⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVIII. 2.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVIII. 3.

It is not known how long Seneca spent in Egypt. It is difficult to tease biographical detail from Seneca's works and even more difficult to tie them to any definite period of his life. So often these snippets are introduced chiefly to illustrate a particular philosophical point. There are, however, enough references to his state of health to conclude that he suffered from asthma and perhaps also tuberculosis.⁸ He mentions also the debt to his aunt who nursed him through a prolonged bout of illness.⁹ It seems reasonable to link this episode with his description of the illness that caused him to consider killing himself and that occurred before his father's death. He had returned from Egypt to Rome no later than A.D. 31.

These, then, are possible factors in Seneca's delayed entry into the senate: serious illness necessitating prolonged medical treatment and a lengthy convalescence, an interest in the study of philosophy that could be indulged with a clear conscience due to his state of health. In addition Seneca had perhaps been pursuing a different path to influence and possible power. Seianus had shown what could be achieved by an ambitious and ruthless *eques*. The principate had opened an alternative to the traditional Republican route into the senate, one that was not dependent on wooing the support of the old senatorial families that tended still to dominate the senate and continued to discriminate against *noui homines*, especially those of provincial origin.¹⁰ The senate's reaction to the Emperor Claudius' proposal to enrol prominent citizens from Gaul amongst its members is instructive. Tacitus' account of the senate's reaction gives the impression that Claudius intended to fill the benches with betrousered and bewhiskered barbarians.¹¹

Another possible reason for Seneca's late start is his apparent lack of military experience. Soldiering and politics still went hand-in-hand.¹² Nowhere does he himself mention such military

⁷ Pliny the Elder, *N. H.* XXVIII. 54; XXXI. 62; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* V. xix. 6.

⁸ Seneca, *Epp.* LIV. 1-3, 6; LV. 2; LXXVIII. 2. I am indebted to Michael Denborough of the John Curtin School of Medical Research, Australian National University, Canberra, for the assurance that it is possible to live with both conditions in the absence of modern medical care, provided neither is severe. It is interesting to note that in his youth, and no doubt by accident, Seneca followed 20th/21st century medical advice given to those suffering from asthma to help improve cardio-pulmonary function. He swam (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXIII. 5).

⁹ Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* XIX. 2.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 53; Veyne, *Seneca*, p. 1.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XI. 23-24.

¹² Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, vol. I, Oxford, 1958, pp. 67, 68.

service. The attack mounted by Suillius Rufus provides support for the impression that Seneca had not served in the army. Suillius contrasts the beginning of his own career on Germanicus' staff with Seneca's policy of seducing the daughters of Germanicus in order to further his ambitions.¹³ Such criticism would have lost much of its force if Seneca had been able to declare some military experience of his own. Seneca's failure to serve in the legions, for whatever reason, was a decided disadvantage, giving at least one enemy the chance to accuse him of being a 'play-boy' and of avoiding danger and inconvenience.

By A.D. 41 Seneca was a member of the circle surrounding Julia Livilla. If this were not so his exile on the ground of adultery with her would have made no sense. The accusation must have seemed plausible. He was also close to Julia's sister, Agrippina. It is probable that Julia Livilla and Agrippina had friends in common. Both had been exiled by their brother when he uncovered a conspiracy in 39. Seneca might also have been involved. Cassius Dio records under the year 39 that Gaius considered executing Seneca, supposedly because of envy of his rhetorical skill.¹⁴ One has to wonder if there was a more rational basis even for that irrational emperor's enmity.

Seneca's ill-health, and the intervention of a 'certain woman,' an intimate of the emperor, saved his life.¹⁵ She observed to Gaius that Seneca was terminally ill.¹⁶ The implication was that there was no need to condemn to death a man who was already dying. Clarke has suggested that this woman was the emperor's sister Agrippina.¹⁷ If it was Agrippina then Seneca had succeeded in obtaining a patron close to the centre of power. Even if the woman cannot be identified with Agrippina the anecdote, if true, demonstrates Seneca's close ties with imperial circles. The gunhvi~ not only had the ear of the emperor, she also enjoyed his confidence.¹⁸ Moreover she knew Seneca well enough to be aware of his parlous state of health. If her remark was not an idle observation but a deliberate attempt to save Seneca's life, then she thought highly enough of him to make the effort. It seems that Seneca was able to charm the imperial ladies: Agrippina, Julia

¹³ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 42.

¹⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIX. 19.

¹⁵ ... gunaikiv tini w|n ejcrh'to... (Dio, *Roman History* LIX. 19. 8).

¹⁶ ... gunaikiv tini w|n ejcrh'to pisteuvs" o{ti... oujk ej" makra;n teleuthvsoi (Dio, *Roman History* LIX. 19. 8).

¹⁷ G. W. Clarke, 'Seneca the Younger under Caligula,' *Latomus* XXIV (1965), pp.64-65.

¹⁸ ...gunaikiv tini... pisteuvs" (Dio, *Roman History* LIX. 19. 8).

Livilla, 'a certain woman.' He was not as successful with their men-folk. Gaius was less than impressed with his talents,¹⁹ Claudius banished him, Nero condemned him to death.

If Seneca had been, as Jane Bellemore suggests,²⁰ a member of Tiberius' court, it was probably then that he formed friendships with Agrippina, Julia Livilla and perhaps also Gaius. More even than most ambitious *equites*, Seneca needed a powerful patron. He had no military service, the usual basis of an equestrian career,²¹ an omission that a personal enemy was only too happy to criticise.²²

The attention of Gaius proved dangerous when that unstable emperor decided that the excesses of his predecessor's last years were the fault of the senate,²³ or of anyone other than Tiberius himself. As an ambitious young man beginning a public career it would have been natural for Seneca to join the circles around the younger members of the imperial family. Either he failed to make a good impression on Gaius or perhaps any friendship was destroyed by the young emperor's envy of Seneca's rhetorical skills. According to Gaius ... *Senecam... commissiones meras componere et harenam esse sine calce.*²⁴ This indictment could well have been the result of jealousy. It could equally well be an honest opinion. Gaius himself was a skilled orator²⁵ and Quintilian's opinion of Seneca was hardly more flattering.²⁶ Quintilian's criticism contains an echo of that of Gaius. Both held that his style appealed to the young and, presumably, immature.²⁷

¹⁹ Suetonius, *C. Caligula* LIII.

²⁰ See pp. 97-98 below.

²¹ Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire. Economy, Society and Culture*, London: Duckworth, 1987, p. 23.

²² Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 42.

²³ Suetonius, *C. Caligula* XXX. 2; Griffin, *Seneca*, pp.53, 56.

²⁴ Suetonius, *C. Caligula* LIII.

²⁵ ...[*C. Caesar*] *quantumuis facundus et promptus... et uerba et sententiae suppetebant, pronuntiatio quoque et uox... et exaudiretur a procul stantibus* (Suetonius, *C. Caligula* LIII). *..etiam G. Caesaris turbata mens uim dicendi non corrumpit* (Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 3).

²⁶ ... *sed in eloquendo corrupta pleraque, atque eo perniciosissima quod abundant dulcibus uitiis* (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* X. i. 129). ... *nam si aliqua contempsisset, si parum non concupisset, si non omnia sua amasset, si rerum pondera minutissimis sententiis non fregisset, consensu potius eruditorum quam puerorum amore probaretur* (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* X. i. 130).

²⁷ Tacitus preserves another very similar opinion supposedly uttered by P. Suillius: *simul studiis inertibus et iuuenum imperitiae suetum ...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XIII.42). Aulus Gellius is equally unflattering. *De Annaeo Seneca partim existimant ut de scriptore minime utili, cuius libros adtingere nullum pretium operae sit, quod oratio eius uulgaria uideatur et protrita... eruditio autem uernacula et plebeia nihilque ex ueterum scriptis habens neque gratiae neque dignitatis* (*N. A.* XII. ii. 1).

2. 1 Exile

Having survived the madman Seneca fell victim to the scholar. The Emperor Claudius exiled him to Corsica. According to Cassius Dio his crime was an immoral relationship with Julia Livilla.²⁸ This episode is mysterious. Cassius Dio blames Messalina rather than Claudius himself for Seneca's punishment. In Dio's account Messalina was jealous of Julia and, wanting to be rid of her, secured her banishment.²⁹ If Messalina engineered Julia's exile, as claimed by Dio, how was Seneca caught up in the drama? Perhaps more was involved than is immediately obvious. Seneca had an unfortunate propensity to attract the enmity of the powerful. He also suffered from another dangerous habit. Too often he was too closely connected with too many who attracted the suspicion of the ruling *princeps*.³⁰ Thus in 39 Agrippina was exiled for her involvement in a conspiracy in which Seneca's friend, the younger Lucilius, was also implicated.³¹ Again, in 41, M. Vinicius, husband of Julia Livilla, aspired to the principate.³² It had been his *amici* who had led the conspiracy that overthrew Gaius.³³ The trial and subsequent exile of Julia Livilla and of Seneca suggest that both were suspect. Although Claudius had gained from the murder of his nephew he could hardly have felt comfortable with those who had engineered it, especially as he had not been their choice as successor. Claudius' unexpected accession must have come as a rude shock to many who had other plans and supported other candidates. It is no surprise to find that there had been numerous conspiracies in the early years of Claudius' reign, as Suetonius claims.³⁴ What had succeeded once could be attempted again. This fear probably lay behind Claudius' decision to marry his own niece despite the outrage this incestuous union caused to Roman sensibilities.³⁵ As great-granddaughter of the revered Augustus and, perhaps even more importantly,³⁶ daughter of the beloved Germanicus, Agrippina provided a nucleus around which the disaffected could gather. Any man who married her was a potential usurper.³⁷ Claudius'

²⁸ Dio, *Roman History* LX. 8. 5

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *non mihi in amicitia Gaetuliici Gaius fidem eripuit. ...non in aliorum infeliciter amatorum... propositum meum potuerunt euertere* (Seneca *N.Q.* IVA, *praef.* 15).

³¹ Clarke, 'Seneca the Younger under Caligula,' p. 66.

³² Clarke, 'Seneca the Younger under Caligula,' p. 67.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Suetonius, *Claudius* XIII.

³⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* XXVI; Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 5.

³⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7.

³⁷ *... claritudinem Caesarum aliam in domum ferret* (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 2).

marriage to her was an attempt to forestall this danger.

Seneca did not cope well with exile, despite his own writings on how the Stoic should react to this misfortune:

*nullum inueniri exilium intra mundum potest; nihil enim, quod intra mundum est, alienum homini est.*³⁸

It might be expected that he would have used the time constructively by pursuing his philosophical studies, as he apparently had during the prolonged period of ill-health in his youth. He must have written more than the two *consolationes* that can be firmly dated to this time. When Agrippina eventually secured his recall she did so, according to Tacitus, for several reasons. One was that she believed that he could help in her ambition to secure the throne for her son;³⁹ another that she judged that it would be a popular move because of Seneca's literary eminence.⁴⁰ Seneca had not been in Rome for eight years. One way his reputation could have been kept alive was by the circulation of his writings. The addition of only two more works to the existing *corpus* seems little enough under the circumstances to maintain a position of literary eminence. It is possible that some of the tragedies were composed during this period.⁴¹

Octauia is included among his tragedies although it is almost certain that he did not write it. The writing style differs from Seneca's own and the description of Nero's death is thought to be too accurate to be the result of a lucky guess.⁴² It is also difficult to believe that anyone would have

³⁸ Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* VIII. 5. Much of this work is concerned with demonstrating that, despite common opinion, exile is not an evil.

³⁹ ... *ad spem dominationis*... (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 8).

⁴⁰ ... *laetum in publicum rata ob claritudinem studiorum eius*... (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 8).

⁴¹ Motto suggests that they can be dated from about 45 to 55 (Motto, *Seneca*, p. 13); L. D. Reynolds, Miriam T. Griffin and Elaine Fantham in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (third revised edition [2003], pp. 96-98) claim that the tragedies cannot be dated but tentatively suggest that *Hercules furens* (thought to be the earliest) was written before 54.

⁴² ?Seneca, *Octauia* 619-631. In the play Nero's death is presented in the form of a prophecy delivered by the ghost of Agrippina:

*ultrix Erinys impio dignum parat
letum tyranno, uerbera et turpem fugam
poenasque..*

-? Seneca, *Octauia* 619-621.

*animam nocentem sceleribus, iugulum hostibus
desertus ac destructus et cunctis egens*

? Seneca, *Octauia* 630-631.

dared to portray Nero in the way that the *Octavia* does while that emperor was still alive. The true author is unknown, but it is thought that he was acquainted with Seneca and possibly an eyewitness to some of the events he describes.

The play presents a sympathetic view of Seneca. Its author thought highly enough of him to cast him in a positive light. He obviously believed also that his audience would sympathise with this portrayal. Seneca appears in the drama as the philosopher dragged unwillingly from his island retreat.⁴³ This Seneca would present an attractive figure to Christians, the moral philosopher summoned from exile to instruct Nero.

Given his inability to accept banishment the portrayal is ironic. It is difficult to believe that the author was unaware of Seneca's un-Stoic reaction to exile. Even if Seneca had tried to suppress the *consolationes* addressed to his mother and to Polybius⁴⁴ there can be little doubt that his enemies would have ensured that he failed. That there were influential enemies cannot be doubted. Every powerful figure acquires enemies. Tacitus mentions at least two groups hostile to Seneca.⁴⁵

The drama portrays Seneca as the humanitarian philosopher preaching clemency to an unheeding emperor. Nero calls him a mild old man who should be teaching children.⁴⁶ This echoes the estimation of both Gaius, "a text-book orator" and of Quintilian, who criticised his style as one that appeals to the young, and immature. It would seem, then, that Seneca was viewed by many of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries primarily as an educator. In his last hours he defined himself similarly as *educator praeceptorque*.⁴⁷ The author of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul also stresses Seneca's position of *magister tanti*

See Frank Justus Miller (trans), *Seneca's Tragedies*, vol. II, Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann, 1917, p. 405 and p. 460, translator's note 3.

⁴³ ?Seneca, *Octavia* 378-390.

⁴⁴ Cassius Dio claims that Seneca suppressed *Ad Polybium* (Cassius Dio LXI. 2. See translator's note 2, p. 57 of the 1925 Loeb edition).

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 42; XIV. 52.

⁴⁶ *praecipere mitem conuenit pueris senem* (?Seneca, *Octavia* 445).

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62.

principis even extending it to include *omnium*.⁴⁸

Tacitus' Seneca does not refer to his other role, that of advisor to Nero. Seneca's authority might have been unofficial and perhaps not even obvious to contemporaries outside the emperor's immediate circle. It was none the less real. Agrippina herself had acknowledged the reality of Seneca's power as her son's adviser: *generis humanis regimen*.⁴⁹ She was outraged. Seneca's assumption of authority had not been part of her plan. She regarded him as usurper of a position that rightfully was hers.

Later authors also recognised the depth of Seneca's power and influence. Tacitus refers to it. *Hi rectores (sc. Seneca et Burrus) imperatoriae iuuentae et rarum in societate potentiae concordēs*.⁵⁰ St. Jerome describes him as both *Neronis magister* and *illius temporis potentissimus*. The author of the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul does not refer explicitly to Seneca's power. His description of the philosopher's ease of access to the emperor's inner circle, however, carries the implication of influence.⁵¹

Seneca's tragedies as a whole seem to offer little insight into his philosophy or his political activities, although they do reflect Stoic psychology, ethics and physics.⁵² Costa believes that they were experiments, attempts at a new form of literary drama.⁵³ Modern productions of some of the plays demonstrate that they can be staged.⁵⁴ There is scholarly disagreement on the question of whether Seneca intended that they be performed, whether as stage productions or as *recitationes*.⁵⁵ Also unclear is whether they were performed in first century Rome.⁵⁶ The fact that they can be staged and that there have been modern productions does not mean that they were

⁴⁸ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep. II*.

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Annals XIII. 14*.

⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Annals XIII. 2*.

⁵¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Epp. III, VII*

⁵² Reynolds, Griffin and Fantham, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*³.

⁵³ C. D. N. Costa, 'The Tragedies,' in C. D. N. Costa (ed), *Seneca*, London: Routledge, 1974, p. 109.

⁵⁴ George W. M. Harrison (ed), *Seneca in Performance*, London: Duckworth, 2000, p. vii.

⁵⁵ Reynolds, Griffin and Fantham, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*³; see also John G. Fitch, 'Playing Seneca?' in *Seneca in Performance*, pp. 1-12; Elaine Fantham, 'Production of Seneca's *Trojan Women*, Ancient? And Modern,' in *Seneca in Performance*, pp. 13-26; Sander M. Goldberg, 'Going for Baroque. Seneca and the English,' in *Seneca in Performance*, p. 225.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

performed in contemporary or near-contemporary Rome.

Epigrams attributed to Seneca are also dated to the time of exile,⁵⁷ although all except three in the Codex Salamasianus are of dubious authorship.⁵⁸ Two are entitled *De Corsica*. One of these ends on a note of suicidal despair: *uiuorum cineri sit tua terra leuis*,⁵⁹ a modification of the popular Roman epitaph, *sit tibi terra leuis*. Seneca feels that he has been buried alive.

The years on Corsica contradict any notion that Seneca was in love with death. Even if the epigrams entitled *De Corsica* were not written by him, *Ad Polybium* gives sufficient indication of the depression he suffered in exile. Yet he did not kill himself during his time on Corsica. His eventual death, moreover, was brought about by a sentence of execution. In accordance with his status Seneca was permitted to choose the manner of his death. The emperor was concerned only that the condemned man should die as soon as possible. Tacitus' Seneca himself includes his own death amongst the murders already committed by Nero.

*neque aliud superesse post matrem fratremque interfectos quam ut educatoris
preceptorisque necem adiceret.*⁶⁰

There is nothing to suggest that young aristocrats flocked to Seneca as they would later to both Musonius Rufus and Epictetus. This of course is not surprising. Seneca might have been, as Cassius Dio describes him, superior in wisdom to all the Romans of his day,⁶¹ but he was not as renowned as a teacher of wisdom as both Musonius and Epictetus would be.

Of the two *consolationes* written during the Corsican years, that to his mother, *Ad Heluiam matrem de consolatione* is particularly interesting in providing an insight into the struggle

⁵⁷ Motto, *Seneca*, p. 137, note 4.

⁵⁸ There is considerable scholarly disagreement on Seneca's authorship of the epigrams. Costa ('The Tragedies,' p. 144) believes they are not his; Reynolds, Griffin and Fantham (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*³) attribute to Seneca three epigrams preserved in the *Codex Salamasianus*; D. R. Shackleton Bailey (*Anthologia Latina* I.1) accepts nine (A.L. 228 - 237), including the two on Corsica mentioned in the text; Sorensen, while acknowledging that only three epigrams have survived under Seneca's name, accepts 69 others associated with them (Villy Sorensen, *Seneca: the Humanist at the Court of Nero*, W. Glyn Jones (trans), Edinburgh: Canongate, 1984, p.121).

⁵⁹ ?Seneca, A. L. 228.

⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62.

⁶¹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIX. 19. 7.

between Seneca the Stoic philosopher and Seneca the ambitious politician whose career is in ruins. He expresses the correct Stoic responses to misfortune. He reassures his mother that he is suffering no ill nor is he even unhappy, indeed he cannot be made unhappy.⁶² He is now as happy as he was when his circumstances were at their best.⁶³ In fact his present circumstances *are* the best since now he is free to pursue his studies.⁶⁴ Exile is no more than a change in place.⁶⁵ All this is properly Stoic, although the reader cannot escape the impression that Seneca wrote it in an attempt to convince himself that exile was not an evil.⁶⁶ The only non-Stoic aspect of the *Ad Heluiam* is the fact that it is a *consolatio*. *Consolationes* were written to comfort the bereaved. As Seneca himself points out, no *consolatio* had ever before been written by the person mourned.⁶⁷ When he urges his mother to return to her studies, which will comfort and cheer her and prevent her from dwelling on her sorrows, he is really trying to encourage and console himself.⁶⁸ The very fact that Seneca wrote this work demonstrates his bitterness and despair. Despite his claim that he had recovered from his own grief and can therefore offer comfort to his mother,⁶⁹ Seneca is really saying that he might as well be dead. This is not a Stoic stance.

It has already been noted that there are two Senecan works that can definitely be dated to the Corsican exile. The other is also a *consolatio*, at least ostensibly, *Ad Polybium de consolatione*. It is supposed to be a letter of condolence to Polybius on the death of his brother. Polybius was one of Claudius' freedmen and at this time held the influential post of *a libellis*.⁷⁰ In fact the work is

⁶² ... *nihil mihi mali esse* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* IV. 2); *indico me non esse miserum ... ne fieri quidem me posse miserum* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* IV. 3).

⁶³ Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* XX. 1.

⁶⁴ *sunt enim optimae, quoniam animus omnis occupationis expers operibus suis uacat et modo leuioribus studiis oblectat, modo ad considerandam suam uniuersique naturam ueri auidus insurgit* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* XX. 1-2).

⁶⁵ (*exilium*) *nempe loci commutatio* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* VI. 1). The sentiment is repeated at *De uita beata* XX. 3: *ego terras omnis tamquam meas uidebo*

⁶⁶ *primum uidebar. depositurus omnia incommoda ...* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* I. 1); *...quid sit exilium. Nempe loci commutatio* (*ibid* VI. 1).

⁶⁷ ... *cum omnia clarissorum ingeniorum monimenta ad compescendos moderandosque luctus composita euoluerem, non inueniebam exemplum eius, qui consolatus suos esset, cum ipse ab illis comploraretur* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* I. 2).

⁶⁸ *nunc ad illas (sc. disciplinas) reuertere; tutam te praestabunt. Illae consolabuntur, illae delectabunt... numquam amplius intrabit dolor, numquam sollicitudo, numquam adflictationis irritae superuacua uexatio* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* XVII. 4 - 5).

⁶⁹ Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* I. 1.

⁷⁰ Seneca, *Ad Polybium* VI. 5.

a begging letter, pleading for an end to Seneca's punishment. Seneca hoped to enlist Polybius' support, or perhaps he merely hoped that the freedman would read the letter to Claudius. The flattery of both Polybius and the emperor is laid on with a trowel. There are none of the sentiments on exile expressed in his letter to his mother. This could not be expected, of course, or why beg to be recalled? Instead he complains that his mind is rusting and he is even in danger of forgetting his native tongue.⁷¹

It is clear, then, that philosophy failed to comfort him in these years of wretchedness. This is underlined by the conclusion of *Ad Polybium*.

*Haec utcumque potui, longo iam situ obsoleto et hebetato animo composui. Quae si aut parum respondere ingenio tuo aut parum mederi dolori uidebuntur, cogita, quam non possit is alienae uacare consolationi, quem sua mala occupatum tenent, et quam non facile latina ei homini uerba succurrant, quem barbarorum inconditus et barbaris quoque humanioribus grauis fremitus circumsonat.*⁷²

The *consolatio* is a plea for the writer's recall rather than an expression of sympathy on the death of Polybius' brother. For whatever reason Seneca's appeal was ignored and he remained on Corsica.

Veyne believes that there is no contradiction in these attitudes.⁷³ It was not dishonourable for Seneca to attempt to have his sentence curtailed.⁷⁴ Just as it was not required that an honourable inheritance be spurned, so an honourable attempt to change a 'preferred indifferent' was not unvirtuous (in the Stoic sense) in Stoic theory.

Seneca's complaints, however, do cause him to suffer in comparison with both Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, at least in the eyes of modern readers. Musonius was exiled to Gyara, a desolate, supposedly waterless and wretchedly poor island in the Cyclades and one of the empire's more

⁷¹ Seneca, *Ad Polybium* XVIII. 9.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Veyne, *Seneca*, p. 82.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

dreaded penal islands.⁷⁵ Musonius appears to have accepted his lot in the spirit advised by Seneca:

*Patria est ubicumque bene est. Illud autem per quod bene est in homine, non in loco est.
... Si sapiens est, peregrinatur, si stultus, exulat.*⁷⁶

He continued to teach as if he were still in Rome, unaffected by his change of residence. Young men travelled to his place of exile to hear him lecture. He is supposed also to have discovered a previously unknown source of fresh water.⁷⁷

Epictetus also was forced to leave Rome. It seems that he was not exiled personally, as were both Seneca and Musonius Rufus. He was caught up in the general banishment of philosophers by Domitian in A.D. 95.⁷⁸ He appears never to have returned to Rome, settling in Nicopolis where he continued to attract students as he had before he was banished.⁷⁹

Both Musonius Rufus and Epictetus enjoy an advantage over Seneca. Their words exist only as preserved by admiring disciples. It is possible that no censorship was necessary but it is unlikely that we shall ever know. Seneca, on the other hand, speaks to us directly.

At about the same time that he was sentenced Seneca suffered calamitous personal losses. His son died, as did two nephews.⁸⁰ It is possible that his wife also died at this period. Seneca's philosophical convictions could not shield him from the impact of such personal tragedies on top of exile. As he himself stated, he was not entitled to the title of *sapiens*.⁸¹ He readily admitted that he did not, could not as yet, live as he knew he ought.⁸²

⁷⁵ Martin Percival Charlesworth, *Five Men. Character Studies from the Roman Empire*, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1936, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Seneca, *De remediis fortuitorum* 8, in Newman, 'Senecae *De remediis*. I am following Newman in accepting *De remediis* as a genuine Senecan work. See Newman, 'Senecae *De remediis*, pp. 13-112.

⁷⁷ Cora E. Lutz, 'Musonius Rufus: the Roman Socrates,' *YCS* 10 (1947), p. 15.

⁷⁸ Long, *Epictetus*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Long, *Epictetus*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁰ Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* II. 2. 5.

⁸¹ e. g. *sapientem esse me dico? Minime ...* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* V. 2);... "*non sum sapiens et... nec ero...*" (Seneca, *De uita beata* XVII. 3).

⁸² *De uirtute, non de me loquor, et cum uitii conuicium facio, in primis meis facio. Cum potuero, uiuam quomodo oportet* (Seneca, *De uita beata* XVIII.1 –2).

2. 2 Recall

Despite his pleas Seneca had to endure several more long years on Corsica. At last, in 49, he was recalled to Rome.⁸³ His enemy, Messalina, was dead and, perhaps as importantly, disgraced, and his patron, Agrippina, was now Claudius' wife. Was his offence so serious that Claudius would not contemplate his return? Agrippina seems to have had little difficulty in securing his recall. Claudius was notoriously absent-minded so it is possible that the *princeps* had simply forgotten him.⁸⁴

Tacitus advances several reasons for Agrippina's interest in Seneca. Firstly, after causing a series of deaths, she wanted to perform a deed she knew would be popular. It has already been pointed out that Seneca's reputation was probably kept alive in Rome by the circulation of his works. Whom was Agrippina hoping to impress? Most of Seneca's friends were *equites*.⁸⁵ Perhaps she was trying to cultivate support amongst this status group, a group that Claudius seems to have alienated,⁸⁶ for what Tacitus calls "a hope for supremacy."⁸⁷ Alexander points out that Tacitus uses a plural verb here: *...consiliis eiusdem ad spem dominationis uterentur*.⁸⁸ It is possible that it refers only to Nero, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, as he was then, and Agrippina herself. This, however, seems unlikely. The overwhelming impression conveyed by Tacitus is that Nero was not an ambitious young man and was uninterested, at least at first, in wielding power. Moreover when his mother married Claudius he was only about twelve years old. Alexander's suggestion that "they" are the 'queen's party' appears to be more likely.⁸⁹ Agrippina had already obtained support in the Senate, although Tacitus names only one ally, Vitellius.⁹⁰ Tacitus is scathing about this man. He had an eye for the main chance and was prepared to abuse his

⁸³ *at Agrippina... ueniam exilii pro Annaeo Seneco simul praeturam impetrat... quia Seneca fidus in Agrippinam memoria beneficii... credebatur* (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 8).

⁸⁴ Suetonius, *Claudius* XXXIX, XL.

⁸⁵ Griffin, *Seneca*, p. 96.

⁸⁶ See p. 99 below.

⁸⁷ *... ad spem dominationis...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 8).

⁸⁸ William Hardy Alexander, 'The Tacitean *non liquet* on Seneca,' in Ludwig Edelstein, W. M. Green, L. A. MacKay and H. R. W. Smith (edd), *University of California Publications in Classical Philology*, vol. XIV (1950-1952), p. 288.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 4.

position to assist Agrippina's schemes.⁹¹ He was censor and it must be assumed that he commanded not only the power given by that office but also considerable support amongst fellow senators.

The other reason Tacitus gives is that she wanted Seneca to oversee the education of her son.⁹² This is the aspect of Seneca's career that the author of the apocryphal correspondence emphasises. In this correspondence Seneca is first and foremost a teacher: of Nero, of St. Paul, of everyone.⁹³ In the first letter written by P to S (*Ep.* II in Barlow's edition), the author hails Seneca as *magister tanti principis etiam omnium*.

Seneca's task was to groom Nero for the succession. Agrippina had no intention that Seneca should tutor her son in philosophy. She forbade the inclusion of the subject in her son's curriculum. It was, in her opinion, no proper study for a future ruler.⁹⁴ If any inducement more than the ending of an insupportable exile was needed, then this surely was it. The opportunity to mould the next (possible) *princeps* was irresistible. Seneca often shows the face of philosophical mentor throughout the letters to Lucilius; *De clementia* is a handbook for the philosopher-king. Agrippina's proscription of philosophical studies was easy to evade. There appears to have been no consideration for the position of Britannicus, Claudius' own son. This is not surprising. There was no law of succession and even if there had been the emperor had adopted Nero, thus placing him on an equal footing with Britannicus. If anything, his status as the elder gave him the advantage especially when his promotion to the *toga uirilis* was brought forward.

Jane Bellemore has suggested an earlier date than is usually accepted for Seneca's work, *Ad Marciam de consolatione*.⁹⁵ She would date it to between A.D. 34 and 37.⁹⁶ If this dating is correct, then *Ad Marciam* is Seneca's earliest surviving work. It also implies that Seneca was a

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 8.

⁹³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Epp.* II, X.

⁹⁴ Suetonius, *Nero* LII.

⁹⁵ It has been variously dated to the reign of Gaius or that of Claudius (Jane Bellemore, 'The Dating of Seneca's *Ad Marciam de consolatione*' *CQ* XLII [1992], p. 219). Motto dates it to c. 40 or 41 (Motto, *Seneca*, pp. 14-15).

⁹⁶ Bellemore, 'The Dating of Seneca's *Ad Marciam*', p. 219.

member of Tiberius' court.⁹⁷ Marcia was a friend of Livia,⁹⁸ suggesting that Seneca had powerful contacts, or was trying to cultivate them. Certainly his aunt, who assisted him in his senatorial career, had such contacts, either in her own right or through her husband.⁹⁹ If Seneca did hold some position of influence under Tiberius it would help to explain why Agrippina went to the trouble to attach him to herself. On the face of it there does appear to be some mystery behind her efforts to have him recalled from exile. She could be acidic on the topic of his oratorical and rhetorical skills, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates. Yet these were the very qualities that supposedly she valued in the man who was to oversee the grooming of her son for the position of *princeps*. She placed no value on Seneca's philosophical learning and discouraged him from any attempt to impart it to Nero.¹⁰⁰ If, however, Seneca had been active in the court of three emperors then it is likely that he had learned a great deal about imperial administration.¹⁰¹ His relatively low official rank on the *cursus honorum* could have been an advantage.¹⁰² He was more likely to be a king's (or perhaps a queen's) man rather than the Senate's. His debt of gratitude to the empress for rescuing him from the misery of exile should have attached him firmly to herself and her son. He owed nothing to Claudius who was officially responsible for his exile. If the *Apocolocyntosis* is any guide Seneca's feelings of bitterness towards the old emperor were not mitigated by his recall. Claudius was to be blamed for his banishment but not praised for his return. Seneca's loyalty would be to the new regime. Agrippina's efforts to secure Seneca's services for Nero worked only too well. Eventually he would desert his saviour in favour of her son.

Seneca belonged to the equestrian order from whose ranks later emperors were to choose trusted administrators. The Plinii, uncle and nephew, exemplify this group. They were *noui homines*. They had no family ties to the descendants of the Republican aristocracy and therefore lacked a strong sense of loyalty to the Senate. Their loyalty was to the emperor who was their patron. They had little opportunity to create a military power base that might enable them to challenge

⁹⁷ Bellemore, 'The Dating of Seneca's *Ad Marciam*', p. 233.

⁹⁸ Seneca, *Ad Marciam* III. 4. 1.

⁹⁹ Seneca, *Ad Heluam* XVIII. 19. 2.

¹⁰⁰ *sed a philosophia eum mater auertit monens imperaturo contrariam esse* (Suetonius, *Nero* LII).

¹⁰¹ *... consiliis eiusdem (sc. Senecae) ad spem dominationis uterentur* (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 8).

¹⁰² According to Motto he was either an aedile or a tribune of the plebs in 36 or 37 (Motto, *Seneca*, p. 19).

for the principate as Vespasian, and others, would do. Their status as *equites*, as well as the lack of family connections to the old aristocracy made them less of a threat to the *princeps*. At the same time they could disarm the critics of rule by slaves and freedmen. The *familia Caesaris* could, and probably did, continue to wield the real power during Nero's principate. But imperial administration acquired an acceptable facade of respectable equestrian officials.

Agrippina was doing no more than revive the policy of earlier powerful members of the Julio-Claudian families of entrusting power to talented and loyal *equites*. Julius Caesar had employed Oppius and Balbus;¹⁰³ Marcus Agrippa was Augustus' trusted lieutenant until his death, although it must be admitted that Tiberius' promotion of Seianus was not as successful. The early years of Claudius' reign had been marred by a purge of equestrian ranks. Barrett has suggested that that might have been the result of unrest among the *equites* caused by their subordination to freedmen.¹⁰⁴ Certainly Claudius' regime was later (and possibly at the time) regarded as notorious for the power enjoyed by freedmen, even slaves and wives.¹⁰⁵ Agrippina was no doubt concerned that her son's reign begin with at least the appearance that power would be invested in persons deemed fit to administer it. There was one perceived abuse of the previous reign that she had no intention of reforming. That was her own exercise of power.

It is probable that Seneca would have accepted almost any condition to obtain his recall. The position as *amicus Neronis* was undeniably attractive. It returned him to the centre of power as well as to Rome. He knew Agrippina and was aware of her ambition. The chance to influence the boy who could one day become emperor was irresistible.

Dio reports that Agrippina and Seneca had an illicit affair.¹⁰⁶ Barrett suggests that the estrangement between them was due to the bitterness engendered by a failed love affair.¹⁰⁷ As Barrett himself points out, however, this was the sort of charge regularly levelled against the

¹⁰³ Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* XI. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Barrett, *Agrippina: Mother of Nero*, London: Batsford, 1996, p. 73.

¹⁰⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 6; Suetonius, *Claudius* XXIX; Dio, *Roman History* LX. 33. 7, 12. For a discussion on the use of contemporary material by these later historians, see Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp.196 - 202.

¹⁰⁶ Dio, *Roman History* LXI. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Barrett, *Agrippina*, p. 107.

prominent.¹⁰⁸ An adulterous affair posed an unacceptable and unnecessary risk to both parties. Despite Dio's claim that Seneca had learned nothing from his banishment for a supposed affair with Agrippina's sister, it is hard to believe that he would have risked the imperial displeasure again for the a similar offence.¹⁰⁹ And it does seem that any affair must have begun during Claudius' lifetime, since the estrangement from Agrippina apparently occurred shortly after Claudius' death. Dio himself seems puzzled by such irrationality on Seneca's part. As if in explanation of such dangerous behaviour, he provides examples of the philosopher's hypocrisy: his denunciation of tyranny when he himself was the teacher of a tyrant, his criticism of flatterers when he indulged in the vice himself when it suited him, his censure of the wealthy when he himself was in possession of immense wealth, and so on.¹¹⁰

Exile had gone hard with Seneca. He would not lightly have risked another term of relegation. It is even more difficult to understand why Agrippina would have jeopardised herself and her ambitions. The very reason she was the emperor's consort was that her predecessor had been executed for an adulterous liaison. According to Tacitus, Agrippina was chaste unless there was something to be gained by being otherwise.¹¹¹ There was nothing to gain by having an affair with Seneca. He was, or should have been, already sufficiently bound to her as his rescuer from an intolerable exile. The only attraction of such a liaison would have been the spice of danger. Neither Seneca nor Agrippina had the kind of personality that required that. Tacitus sums up Agrippina's personality in these words:

*non per lasciuiam, ut Messalina rebus Romanis inludenti. Adductum et quasi uirile seruitium palam seueritas ac saepius superbia nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret.*¹¹²

After the death of her husband, the Emperor Claudius, Agrippina engineered the accession of her son, Nero. What, if anything, Seneca had to do with this is unknown, as is any complicity in the death of Claudius, if indeed his death was the result of murder. Seneca had already survived the

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ οὐδὲ βελτιων ἐκ τῆς φυγῆς ἐγένετο ...(Dio, *Roman History* LXI. 10).

¹¹⁰ Dio, *Roman History* LXI. 10.

¹¹¹ *nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret* (Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 7).

¹¹² Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 7.

death of two rulers. He must at least have observed how to manage the smooth transition of power. Agrippina also had another ally in Burrus, the prefect of the Praetorian Guard. She had persuaded Claudius to institute a unified command and to entrust that command to Burrus, who was well aware to whom he owed his preferment.¹¹³

2. 3 The Death of Agrippina

Seneca's complicity in the death of Agrippina is the blackest mark against him. Too little attention has been given to his role in this incident that occurred at the height of his influence and power. The charge of hypocrisy levelled against Seneca, both in ancient and in more modern times, has concentrated, although not exclusively, on the immense wealth he enjoyed while praising a life of poverty.¹¹⁴ Such attacks on the perceived hypocrisy of philosophers were commonplace in antiquity.¹¹⁵ Seneca freely admitted that he, like most other philosophers, did not live up to his high ideals.

*omnes (sc. Plato, Epicurus, Zeno) enim isti dicebant non quemadmodum ipsi uiuerent, sed quemadmodum esset ipsis uiuendum.*¹¹⁶

In contrast to their critics they did at least aim for those ideals.¹¹⁷

In Seneca's case the accusation misses the mark, although Seneca himself seems to have been sensitive on the topic. *Infirmi animi est pati non posse diuitias.*¹¹⁸ It has been suggested that *De uita beata* is Seneca's own, extended, defence against this very charge.¹¹⁹

There is nothing in Stoic teaching that forbids or even criticises the possession of wealth. Wealth

¹¹³ Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 42.

¹¹⁴ e.g. Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 42 (reporting the opinion of a hostile contemporary of Seneca); Dio, *Histories* LXI. 10. 3; Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, p. 16. The accusation has concentrated on the dissonance between Seneca's immense wealth and his praise of poverty; it is not confined to it. See Wilson, 'Seneca's *Epistles* Reclassified,' p. 171f. Wilson convincingly refutes the charge of hypocrisy in this case (p. 172f).

¹¹⁵ See for example Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* II. 11-12; Seneca, *Epp.* XXIX. 4 ff, CVIII. 36; Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* III. xv. 9ff.

¹¹⁶ Seneca, *De uita beata* XVIII. 1.

¹¹⁷ Seneca, *De uita beata* XVII. 3-4, XVIII. 2.

¹¹⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* V. 6.

¹¹⁹ Miriam T. Griffin, 'Imago Vitae Suae,' in C. D. N. Costa (ed), *Seneca*, London and Boston: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1974, p. 1.

is an indifferent. It is good to possess, equally good not to possess.¹²⁰ Its loss must not be mourned,¹²¹ but neither should an honourable inheritance be spurned.¹²² The only advantage wealth confers is the ability to use it to aid others.¹²³ This opinion is echoed in Christian thought.¹²⁴ Riches must, however, be acquired in a morally acceptable way.¹²⁵ What constitutes a morally acceptable manner was a matter for debate in early Stoicism. Cicero has preserved one such debate between Diogenes of Babylon *magnus et grauis Stoicus* and his pupil Antipater *discipulus eius, homo acutissimus*.¹²⁶

Two ethical problems are discussed. The first is that of a man who has imported a cargo of grain. He could sell the grain at grossly inflated prices since it is a time of famine. He is aware that other vessels also laden with provisions are on their way. The question posed is: should he inform the population of the imminent arrival of more food or should he remain silent and reap a huge profit?¹²⁷

The second is that of an owner of a house that has a good reputation but that he alone knows has serious defects.¹²⁸ Should the vendor reveal what he knows to an intending purchaser? If he does not, then he can expect to sell his property for a great deal more than its true worth.¹²⁹

Antipater maintains that in both cases it is the duty of the vendor to reveal all the information he has. The importer of food to a population suffering famine owes a duty to their common humanity to inform people that relief is at hand.¹³⁰ It would not be ethical to make an immense

¹²⁰ *ego diuitias et praesentis et absentis aequae contemniam...* (Seneca, *De uita beata* XX. 3).

¹²¹ *... mihi diuitiae si effluerint, nihil auferent nisi semet ipsas...* (Seneca, *De uita beata* XXII. 5).

¹²² *ille uero fortunae benignitatem a se non summouebit et patrimonio per honesta quaesito nec gloriabitur nec erubescet* (Seneca, *De uita beata* XXIII. 2).

¹²³ *... quin haec maior materia sapienti uiro sit animi explicandi suum in diuitiis quam in paupertate... in diuitiis et temperantia et liberalitas et diligentia et dispositio et magnificentia campum habeat patentem?* (Seneca, *De uita beata* XXII. 1).

¹²⁴ In the writings of Hermas, (see Chapter 5. 5 below), Proba (see pp.243-244 below) and Augustine, (see p. 244 below), for example.

¹²⁵ Seneca, *De uita beata* XXIII. 1-3.

¹²⁶ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 51.

¹²⁷ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 50.

¹²⁸ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 54.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 52.

profit from their misery. The property vendor who remains silent on the faults of his house also behaves unethically by causing the purchaser to incur a serious loss which the owner is in a position to prevent.¹³¹

Diogenes disagrees. Failing to reveal is not equivalent to concealing.¹³² As long as they comply with the law, the grain dealer and the house vendor are entitled to the best possible price for their wares provided that they do not misrepresent them.¹³³

These Stoic experts agree on the fundamental principles involved.¹³⁴ There is a fundamental obligation to other human beings,¹³⁵ whatever is expedient, even if morally wrong, is not to be preferred to what is morally right.¹³⁶ But even while agreeing on these principles Antipater and Diogenes arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions when dealing with concrete examples.

*nam aut honestum ne factu sit an turpe dubitant, id quod in deliberationem cadit; in quo considerando saepe animi in contrarias sententias distrahuntur.*¹³⁷

The charge of hypocrisy levelled against Seneca can more easily be sustained in his attitude to exile. Clearly he tried for the proper Stoic response. *Ad Heluiam* is as much a *consolatio* and an exhortation to himself as to his mother. But even in this Seneca has a defence:

“‘Philosophers do not practise what they preach,’ you say. Yet they do practise much that they preach, much that their virtuous minds conceive. For indeed if their actions always matched their words, who would be more happy than they? Meanwhile you have no reason to despise noble words and hearts that are filled with noble thoughts. What wonder that those who essay the steep path do not mount to the summit? But if you are a man (*uir*), look up to those who are attempting great things, *even though they fall.*”¹³⁸

¹³¹ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 55.

¹³² Cicero, *De officiis* III. 52.

¹³³ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 51.

¹³⁴ Brad Inwood, ‘Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,’ in Katerina Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford, 1999, p. 123.

¹³⁵ Inwood, ‘Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,’ p. 122.

¹³⁶ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 53.

¹³⁷ Cicero, *De officiis* I. 9. Cicero is quoting, or paraphrasing, Panaetius.

¹³⁸ My emphasis. “*Non praestant philosophi quae loquuntur.*” *Multum tamen praestant quod loquuntur, quod honesta mente concipiunt; namque idem si et paria dictis agerent, quid esset illis beatius? interim non est quod*

Seneca, moreover, never laid claim to the title of *sapiens*. On the contrary, he repeatedly denied any claim to that status.¹³⁹ An inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to face exile with the correct Stoic spirit is one thing. To be accessory to murder is another matter again.

Sevenster is critical of Seneca's character and behaviour. He was blind to Nero's crimes, including Nero's murder of Britannicus.¹⁴⁰ The cause of Britannicus' death, however, is unclear. Locusta seems to have been cast as poisoner supreme. One has to wonder how deserved was her own reputation for expertise in toxic substances, and in fact how much knowledge of poisons existed. A Locusta probably possessed more practical skill than, for example, the elder Pliny, whose knowledge was drawn chiefly if not solely from written sources. Unfortunately we do not have any credible details of the expertise of a Locusta. It should be remembered that Seneca's attempt to die in Socratic fashion from a draught of hemlock failed, indicating that his access to knowledge about even that ancient, and presumably well-known, poison was less than precise.

The caveat that applies to the death of Britannicus is not applicable to that of Agrippina. Her death was a murder; moreover it was matricide, an heinous crime offending against that most important Roman virtue, *pietas*.¹⁴¹ Seneca's role in the murder of Agrippina is the single greatest illustration of how far he was willing to go to retain power. It was the triumph of political pragmatism over principle. The intentional killing of a parent was the most serious offence imaginable against Roman *pietas*. *Principes* adopted the title *pater patriae* for good reasons. Potential rebels risked adding the crime of *impietas* to that of *maiestas*. There appears to be no excuse for Seneca's behaviour in this crime. He made no effort to dissuade Nero from his intention after he became aware of the emperor's first bungled attempt.¹⁴² He became instead his

contemnas bona uerba et bonis cogitationibus plena praecordia. ... quid mirum, si non escendunt in altum ardua adgressi? sed si vir es, suspice, etiam si decidunt, magna conantis. (Seneca, *De uita beata* XX. 1-2).

¹³⁹ Seneca, *Epp.* XXVII. 1, LVII. 3, LXVIII. 8-9, LXXXVII. 4-5, *De uita beata* XVII. 3, XVIII. 1-2, *Ad Heluiam* V. 2, *De ben.* VII. xvii. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, p. 16.

¹⁴¹ Note, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* III. 17: *Post quae Tiberius adolescentem (sc. Marcum Pisonem) crimine ciuilis belli purgauit, patris quippe iussa nec potuisse filium detrectare...*

¹⁴² Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7.

accomplice by asking Burrus to detail soldiers to execute Agrippina.¹⁴³ He then compounded his guilt by composing a letter to the Senate justifying the assassination of the emperor's mother.¹⁴⁴

It is possible to feel some sympathy for the position in which Seneca and Burrus found themselves. They were (no doubt rudely) roused from sleep and hauled from their beds. Hurried, probably without explanation, to Nero's presence, they were confronted by a panic stricken young autocrat with the news that a complicated and literally theatrical scheme to kill Agrippina had failed.¹⁴⁵ The emperor feared that his mother would raise an insurrection. She was about to arm her slaves, perhaps even to incite the army against him.¹⁴⁶ She could appeal to the people and the Senate, accusing her son of attempting to kill her.¹⁴⁷ It is no wonder that both Seneca and Burrus were stunned into silence.¹⁴⁸ Tacitus seems puzzled by the lack of reaction. He offers two possible explanations. They did not want unwelcome advice rejected and they feared that matters had gone so far now that either Agrippina or Nero would have to die.¹⁴⁹ They elected to throw in their lot with Nero. Was Seneca infected by Nero's terror or is it possible that the emperor's fears were real? Perhaps they both believed that Agrippina possessed the will and the support to wage civil war. If so, this episode demonstrates the remarkable extent of Agrippina's influence. Neither Seneca nor Burrus suggested the possibility that Nero's fears were exaggerated. All involved appeared convinced that Agrippina could have roused sufficient support amongst troops, people or even the senate to challenge the emperor. And there was, after all, some reason to suspect her. Agrippina had been exiled by her brother, the Emperor Gaius, for her part in a conspiracy against him. Tacitus claims that she had also threatened Nero. The year after his accession, fearing that he was slipping from her control, she noted that his step-brother,

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 11.

¹⁴⁵ *ergo nauem posse componi docet cuius pars ipso in mari per artem soluta effunderet ignaram* (Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 3, reporting the advice of Anicetus). This might seem an improbable idea. But it is easy to understand how its theatrical nature could have appealed to Nero. Moreover, as its proponent himself pointed out, no suspicion would be aroused by an accident at sea (Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 3). There would probably have been whispers, there were always whispers, but no one could have credibly suggested foul play (Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7).

¹⁴⁶ *... siue seruitia armeret uel militem accenderet, siue ad senatum et populum peruaderet...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7).

¹⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

Britannicus, Claudius' biological son, was almost of age.¹⁵⁰ Britannicus was the true and worthy heir of his father, not this adopted upstart who abused his own mother.¹⁵¹ All this had been shouted, intentionally, in Nero's hearing.¹⁵² Later in the same year she was accused of secretly plotting against Nero.¹⁵³ Agrippina was exonerated and her accusers punished.¹⁵⁴ But a lingering suspicion remained. Agrippina had played king-maker for Nero. And she who makes a king can unmake him.¹⁵⁵

This suspicion does not excuse Seneca's actions. This surely was the time to preach clemency to Nero. Even if his advice went unheeded - as it probably would have done - this was the time to resign; at the very least to refuse to have any part in matricide. Instead Seneca turned to Burrus and suggested that soldiers be sent to kill Agrippina.¹⁵⁶ Now occurred one more remarkable event in an evening of remarkable events. The praetorian prefect replied that his men would not harm a child of Germanicus.

*ille (sc. Burrus) praetorianos toti Caesarum domui obstrictos memoresque Germanici nihil aduersus progeniem eius atrox ausuros respondit.*¹⁵⁷

He was telling Nero that there were occasions when the reigning *princeps* could not rely on the loyalty of his guard and this was one of them. The daughter of Germanicus ranked equally with, perhaps even above, his grandson.

In the event no one aided Agrippina, people, army, or senators. A crowd gathered at the beach as news of the shipwreck spread.¹⁵⁸ Whether that was a show of support for Agrippina or mere curiosity it is impossible to know. Certainly the armed men sent to kill Agrippina had little trouble in dispersing it.¹⁵⁹ Agrippina herself appears not to have fully grasped her danger. Injured

¹⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 12, 14.

¹⁵¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 14.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 19.

¹⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 21-22.

¹⁵⁵ Cassius Dio disagrees. He claims that the gift of absolute power places the giver at the mercy of the recipient (Dio LXI. 7. 3).

¹⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 8.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

in the shipwreck,¹⁶⁰ no doubt still in shock after her narrow escape and her unexpected night dip, she was alone except for her household when her murderers arrived. She was, however, defiant to the end. Burrus was able to persuade the praetorians to accept Agrippina's death as the deserved end for one guilty of *impietas*.¹⁶¹ Murder became suicide due to her consciousness of guilt.

Perhaps there was even some basis for the accusations made against her in the senate as justification for her murder, now labelled a providential death, with suicide implied.¹⁶² Agrippina believed her family's proper place was at the top of the Roman elite. After Germanicus' death the family fortunes had suffered under Tiberius until her brother, Gaius, succeeded to the principate. She had watched his behaviour deteriorate until he lost both the throne and his life. She might even have been involved in a conspiracy to replace him. She had married her uncle to smooth the path to power for her son. Claudius had the reputation of being ruled by his wives and she herself had wielded authority as Claudius' consort. She was in the habit of presiding with her husband over both ordinary business and the reception of ambassadors.¹⁶³ "One of the most remarkable sights of the time" is the comment of Cassius Dio.¹⁶⁴

Agrippina objected when the senate at the beginning of Nero's reign reversed Claudian legislation.¹⁶⁵ There was almost a scene during the visit of an Armenian delegation. Scandal was averted only by quick thinking on Seneca's part. Agrippina was about to join her son on the dais during an audience with the Armenians. Tacitus' report of this episode implies that she had been in the habit of presiding with her husband and intended to continue the practice with her son.¹⁶⁶ The historian sums up his estimate of Agrippina's attitude in typically Tacitean fashion: *ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat*.¹⁶⁷

Agrippina engineered Nero's succession, only to see him behave like the immature young man he

¹⁶⁰ ... *unum tamen uulnus umero excepit*... (Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 5).

¹⁶¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 10.

¹⁶² Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 7, 10

¹⁶³ Dio LX. 33. 7.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 5.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

was rather than the old-fashioned Roman *princeps* she expected him to be. It would not be surprising if she began to wonder if she herself was the only descendant of Germanicus who was fit to rule.

The murder of the emperor's mother marked the real end of Seneca's influence over Nero. Complicity in the death of Agrippina demonstrated that Seneca's written advice in *De clementia*, any oral advice he had given over the years, all meant nothing. Seneca had also demonstrated disloyalty to the woman who had been his patron. She had arranged his return from an unbearable exile and revitalised his career. She had put him in a position to become *amicus principis* and in effect the most powerful man in Rome. She had herself recognised this, with regret and fury, when she had taunted him as the exile with a professorial tongue on the basis of which he demanded government.¹⁶⁸ Burrus, too, had been included in this outburst. He was the cripple who claimed a share of the rule.¹⁶⁹ Yet despite all that both men owed her, neither defended her at the end, although Burrus at least refused to involve his men in her murder. This disloyalty towards their patron must have made Nero begin to wonder how great was their loyalty to himself. There were those who pointed this out to the emperor in the unlikely event he failed to see it for himself.¹⁷⁰

Seneca held that it could be right to execute those who persisted in crime, but only after all other, milder, punishments had failed.¹⁷¹ Whether Agrippina could have been considered to belong to this group is debatable. She was certainly suspected of serious crimes including the murder of Claudius¹⁷² and the deaths of others whose power or position she feared.¹⁷³ But she had not been formally accused of any of them, let alone tried. Moreover Seneca himself had benefited greatly from her deeds. Either he was genuinely ignorant of her actions or he chose to turn a blind eye. It is even possible that Agrippina had not committed any of the crimes attributed to her. The

¹⁶⁸ ... *exul Seneca, ... professoria lingua ... regimen expostulantes* (Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 14).

¹⁶⁹ ... *debilis ... Burrus ... trunca ... manu ...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 14).

¹⁷⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 52; Dio LXI. 4. 5.

¹⁷¹ ... *uerbis et his mollioribus ingenia curare ... transeat deinde ad tristiores orationem, qua moneat adhuc et exprobrat; nouissime ad poenas et has adhuc leues reuocabiles decurrat; ultima supplicia sceleribus ultimis ponat...* (Seneca, *De ira* I. vi. 3); ... *ultima supplicia sceleribus ultimis ponat, ut nemo pereat, nisi quem perire etiam pereuntis intersit* (Seneca, *De ira* I. vi. 3-4; *De ben.* VII. xx. 3).

¹⁷² Tacitus, *Annals* XII. 66-67.

¹⁷³ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 1

powerful, especially if they are women, tend to attract suspicion. Nero himself was not concerned with his mother's past offences; he was worried about what she might be planning for the future. She had arranged his succession. He feared, perhaps with some justification, as we have seen, that she was also capable of engineering his removal.

No other single action by Seneca illustrates that, rather than being a “philosopher in politics,” as Griffin described him,¹⁷⁴ he was primarily a Roman politician with an interest in philosophy. That interest was greater than that exhibited by most other Romans of his class and time. But it was a difference of degree rather than kind. Seneca's decision to help Nero commit murder and his continuing support for the regime demonstrated that in a contest between ethics and pragmatism, ethics would lose. It also destroyed whatever hope he had of continuing to exert a moderating influence on the behaviour of the young emperor. He had shown that he was prepared to assent to murder to retain authority and power. He was no longer in a position to attempt to inculcate the principles he himself had ignored.

There are possible justifications in Stoic ethics even for this crime. Whether a late night meeting with a panicked autocrat provided a suitable venue for the calm and reasoned working out of the principles involved is another question. The following section canvasses such defences for the apparently indefensible.

2. 4 Stoic Justifications for Matricide

According to Diogenes Laertius' report on Stoic beliefs, the wise man, under certain circumstances, was permitted such a normally taboo activity as cannibalism.¹⁷⁵ Seneca himself maintained that

*faciet... sapiens... etiam quae non probabit, ut [etiam] ad maiora transitum inueniat, nec relinquet bonos mores, sed tempori aptabit, et quibus alii utuntur in gloriam aut uoluptatem, utetur agenda rei causa.*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics*.

¹⁷⁵ D. L. VII. 121; Inwood, ‘Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,’ p. 100.

¹⁷⁶ Seneca, *Fragment 19* (Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 109ff); Lactantius, *Diu, Inst.* III. xv. 3.

It could be argued that the threat of civil war, if Agrippina really had been plotting against Nero, justified her death. This thesis is strengthened by Burrus' inability (or unwillingness) to guarantee the loyalty of the army. Would Agrippina really have entered a conspiracy against Nero, a conspiracy that must have culminated in the death of her only son? On a more practical level it is difficult to know whom she could have had in mind as alternative ruler. It is unlikely that she would have acted merely to replace Nero with a 'good' emperor. As the tumultuous year of 68/69 would demonstrate there was no shortage of senatorial aspirants to the purple. Agrippina, according to this theory, would have supported only a replacement she could influence, preferably control. It is even conceivable that she would have attempted to rule in her own right. She appears to have been daring enough to make the attempt. Whether she would have been able to gain enough, or any, support for such a bold move is much more problematic. Seneca was probably in the best position to judge Agrippina's capabilities and chances for success, better even than Nero. To use this philosophical justification, however, Seneca would have had to claim the rare title of *sapiens*, a status he repeatedly denied himself.

Agrippina had previously been accused of conspiring to depose Nero and replace him with Rubellius Plautus, a man who was as closely related to Augustus as was Nero himself.¹⁷⁷ It was alleged that Agrippina planned to marry this man and through him regain control of the empire.¹⁷⁸ Her protestations of innocence on this occasion were believed and her accusers were punished.¹⁷⁹ Burrus himself was accused of involvement in yet another conspiracy.¹⁸⁰ This charge was quickly exposed as mischievous and the informer banished. It appears that rebellion was in the air, whether real or imagined.

Cicero preserves what appears to be an opinion from Hecaton to the effect that a son is justified in placing the safety of his country before that of his father if the father intends to betray his country.¹⁸¹ The question is posed,

si tyrannidem occupare, si patriam prodere conabitur pater, silebitne filius?

¹⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 19.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 21.

¹⁸⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 23.

¹⁸¹ Cicero, *De officiis* III. 90; Gretchen Reydams-Schils, 'Human Bonding and *OIKEIŌSIS* in Roman Stoicism,' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XXII (summer 2002), p. 235.

Pater is specified rather than *parens* no doubt because neither Cicero, nor Hecaton could have imagined a woman planning to seize power. The answer is,

“*Immo uero obsecrabit patrem, ne id faciat. Si nihil proficiet, accusabit, minabitur etiam, ad extremum, si ad perniciem patriae res spectabit, patriae salutem anteponet saluti patris.*”¹⁸²

Burrus had already recommended a comparable course of action to Nero when Agrippina had previously been accused of plotting against him.¹⁸³ Everyone, but especially a parent, according to Burrus, must be given the opportunity to defend themselves.¹⁸⁴

Epictetus records an opinion similar to that Cicero attributes to Hecaton. To; ajgaqovn, says Epictetus, is to be preferred above every form of kinship.¹⁸⁵ My father is nothing to me, he continues, only the good.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, if the good is different from the noble and the just, all relationships disappear.¹⁸⁷ This assessment appears to be in general agreement with that of Hecaton as reported by Cicero, although it is not stated in such clear terms. If kinship is in the way of ‘good,’ then kinship must be abandoned.

There is another defence that Seneca could have advanced for his actions. This relies on the Stoic doctrine of appropriate action.¹⁸⁸ In brief this states that an action can be defended before an idealised court on the grounds that under the circumstances prevailing at the time it was a reasonable decision, even if it turned out later to be morally wrong. If Seneca believed that Agrippina would have begun a civil war then he could have appealed to this defence. It should be noted that Tacitus' Seneca plays no part in Agrippina's death, Tacitus laying all responsibility at the feet of her son. None of Seneca's extant writings contain any justification of his actions, not

¹⁸² Cicero, *De officiis* III. 90.

¹⁸³ Tacitus, *Annals* XIII. 20.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Epictetus, *Discourses* III. iii. 5.

¹⁸⁶ oujde;n èmoi; kai; tō patriv, ajlla; tō ajgaqō (Epictetus, *Discourses* III. iii. 5).

¹⁸⁷ Epictetus, *Discourses* III. iii. 6.

¹⁸⁸ An appropriate action is one that can reasonably be justified under all the circumstances. Relevant circumstances to be taken into account include the identity and relationships of the particular moral agent involved. An action may be appropriate but done for the wrong reason. It can then be considered to be in agreement with nature, but not following nature. The action may even turn out not to have been morally right but could still be defended as having been appropriate under all the conditions prevailing at the time. Even cannibalism and incest can be justifiable under certain circumstances.

surprisingly in view of the danger this would have brought on himself. His final communication while he was dying probably did not either. Tacitus does not quote it on the grounds that it was widely available so it is a safe assumption that it contained nothing to contradict Tacitus' account.

All this sounds too much like special pleading. The conclusion reached above, therefore, is the most likely one. Seneca was first and foremost a practical Roman politician. Philosophy belonged to his private life.

It is intriguing that Nero summoned Burrus and Seneca after Agrippina had survived the first attempt on her life. Was it merely the instinctive reaction of panic to turn to the two men who had guided his early reign or was Nero confident that his chief advisers would assist him even in such a heinous crime?

It is open to question how much of this was known to Christians. We cannot even be certain for how long Seneca's last work was in circulation or whether Christians read it if it were. St. Jerome mentions Seneca's death at Nero's hands so that information at least was known and Jerome's notice ensures that it was available to Christians.¹⁸⁹

2.5 The End of Power

Agrippina's death marked the real end of Seneca's power. Together with Burrus he continued the attempt to check Nero's more outrageous behaviour. The death of Burrus, however, finally ended any last hope Seneca might have entertained of influencing the young *princeps*.¹⁹⁰ Seneca asked leave to retire.¹⁹¹ Although permission was refused he nevertheless retired unofficially, putting an end to the huge *salutationes* that were a mark of his influence and power.¹⁹² He avoided Rome

¹⁸⁹ ... *a Nerone interfectus est* (St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII).

¹⁹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 52.

¹⁹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 53.

¹⁹² Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 56.

as much as possible, claiming that *ualetudo infensa aut sapientiae studia* kept him at home.¹⁹³ Some two years later, in A.D. 64, Seneca again asked the emperor's permission to retire to a country estate.¹⁹⁴ Rumour had it that he wished to distance himself as far as possible from the sacrilege of Nero's looting of temples to raise funds to pay for his ambitious building projects after the fire in Rome.¹⁹⁵ Permission was again refused and Seneca, feigning illness, kept to his room.¹⁹⁶ Tacitus reports an account that Nero planned to have Seneca poisoned but the attempt failed.¹⁹⁷

Given the timing of Seneca's second attempt to retire, immediately after the fire and the subsequent persecution of Christians, it would not be surprising if Christian readers of Tacitus, or of any other record of Seneca's unofficial departure from public life, concluded that Seneca's real motive was different from that stated. His withdrawal of support from Nero could have been misinterpreted as protest against that persecution rather than against the looting of pagan temples.¹⁹⁸ Tertullian for one was familiar with Tacitus' works, although it is unlikely that he would have drawn such a conclusion.

In these years, as if aware that his time was even more limited than he might have expected, given his age and chronic ill-health, Seneca completed seven books on nature, seven more entitled *De beneficiis* and the major surviving statement of his philosophy, the *Epistulae ad Lucilium*. He also wrote, or completed, a work on moral philosophy that has not survived.¹⁹⁹

2. 6 The Death of Seneca

Seneca failed to live up to his philosophy in exile. Pragmatic politics overcame ethics when Agrippina was murdered. In his own dying, however, he at last lived up to his beliefs. He was

¹⁹³ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 56. It is fascinating that 'critical illness' and 'philosophical studies' should be thus linked, even if separated by *aut*. It provides an insight into a Roman view of the study of philosophy. It was suitable only for someone too ill, or too old and infirm, to attend to other, more important, tasks.

¹⁹⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 45.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 179.

¹⁹⁹ Sorensen, *Seneca, the Humanist at the Court of Nero*, p.190.

resolute in his denial of any knowledge of the plot to kill Nero, in stark contrast to so many others involved in the conspiracy, who fell over each other in their eagerness to betray friends and relatives.²⁰⁰ It is possible that Seneca was not privy to the whole plan, although Nero did have good reason to suspect him. Firstly he was denounced by one of the conspirators.²⁰¹ Even without that information Seneca's close contacts with some of those involved would have aroused the emperor's easily aroused suspicions. Lucan was his nephew and Gaius Calpurnius Piso, the intended replacement as *princeps*, was a close friend. Then, too, Seneca had a suspect history. He had an unfortunate propensity to be intimate with too many who attracted the enmity of the ruling emperor.

Nero sent a praetorian tribune to question Seneca, who would admit nothing.²⁰² The tribune reported to Nero who passed sentence of death. Both the tribune, Gaius Silvanus, and the praetorian prefect, Faenius Rufus, were members of the conspiracy. Silvanus consulted the prefect about Nero's order and was told to obey it. He lacked the moral courage to face Seneca, so detailed a centurion to deliver the emperor's decision. Tacitus is scathing about the cowardice and complete lack of initiative demonstrated by these would-be revolutionaries.²⁰³

Refused permission to alter his will in order to leave a more concrete legacy to those friends who remained until the end, Seneca offered them 'the image of his life.'²⁰⁴

Seneca's wife, Pompeia Paulina, elected to die with her husband, despite his protests: ... *manumque percussoris exposcit.*²⁰⁵ This appears to be no more than a dramatic way of announcing that she, too, intended to die, although the use of the word *percussor* carries the implication that this was an execution rather than death freely chosen. This implication, however, is negated by Seneca's praise of his wife. He had been condemned and so had lost his freedom of action. She was free to decide her own fate. To infer that the 'executioner' was the physician

²⁰⁰ Tacitus *Annals* XV. 56, 57.

²⁰¹ Antonius Natalis, according to Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 56.

²⁰² Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 60.

²⁰³ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 61.

²⁰⁴ ... *imaginem uitae suae...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62).

²⁰⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 63.

Annaeus Staius²⁰⁶ or that Paulina was demanding that one of Seneca's freedmen kill her²⁰⁷ reads more into the Latin than in fact exists. Annaeus Staius, *arte medicinae probatus*, is not mentioned until Seneca asks for hemlock after it became obvious that he was not going to bleed to death. If the timing of Tacitus' account can be trusted Paulina's wounds had by then already been bound on Nero's instructions.

As a Stoic Seneca could not forbid her suicide and remain true to his philosophy.²⁰⁸ Two years later another Stoic wife would seek to die with her husband. Thrasea Paetus, however, was able to convince Arria that she should continue to live for the sake of their daughter.²⁰⁹ Paulina and Seneca had no children (none who had survived, at least) and Seneca was unable to employ this argument.

Both cut blood vessels in the arm: *post quae eodem ictu bracchia ferro exoluunt*.²¹⁰ Seneca also had blood vessels in his legs severed. As he was waiting to die, Seneca dictated a last message to the world. Neither, however, bled to death. Nero ordered that Paulina's life be saved. Meanwhile, Seneca drank hemlock, which also proved to be ineffective. Finally he was carried into the steam bath where he suffocated. For a man suffering from at least one chronic ailment, Seneca proved at the end to have a firm grip on life.

There are at least three slightly differing translations of the sentence quoted above: *post quae eodem ictu bracchia ferro exsoluunt*.²¹¹ One is that of Michael Grant in the Penguin edition of 1968: "Then each with one incision of the blade, he and his wife cut their arms." The Loeb edition (trans. John Jackson, 1956) has: "After this, they made the incision in their arms with a single cut." This is ambiguous. Does it mean one stroke for both arms, or one cut each? The

²⁰⁶ Henry Furneaux (ed), *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. II, books XI-XVI, second edition revised by H. F. Pelham and C. D. Fisher, Oxford, 1907, note to *Annals* XV. 63.

²⁰⁷ Veyne, *Seneca*, p. 171 with notes 19 and 22.

²⁰⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 6-10; Arius Didymus *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* 11g25. See also Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Seneca Fragmenten*, p. 135.

²⁰⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 34.

²¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 63. A different translation of this sentence will be suggested (see below).

²¹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 63.

1854 Bohn translation of the Latin text then in use, reads: “after this, both had the veins of their arms opened with a single stroke.”

I would like to suggest that *eodem* in fact qualifies *ferro*. They made the cuts *with the same weapon*. In *Annals* XVI. 11 Tacitus describes another family suicide. Lucius Antistius Vetus, his mother-in-law, Sextia and daughter Antistia Pollitta killed themselves with the same weapon: *eodem ferro abscindunt uenas*. Michael Grant’s translation here is “... with a single weapon, all three of them... opened their veins.”

Pliny the Younger's description of the suicide of Arria and Paetus serves as another example.²¹² Arria stabbed herself (the word used for the weapon is again *ferrum*), drew out the weapon and handed it to her husband. That she showed her husband the way is only part of the story. It is just as important that they used the same weapon. It was the use of a weapon that was significant, especially for a woman, rather than, for example, poison or hanging. Seneca’s society did not frown on suicide as such.²¹³ But some methods of dying were superior to others.

Cassius Dio’s version of Seneca’s death is briefer and less heroic. According to Dio the philosopher died so slowly that his life was ended by the impatient soldiery.²¹⁴ Even more marked is the difference in his treatment of Paulina’s near death. She did not choose death voluntarily. Far from attempting to dissuade her, it was her husband who decided that she should die with him and he himself who severed blood vessels in her arm. It was only the accident that he died first that allowed her life to be saved.²¹⁵ Assuming that Tacitus’ account is closer to reality, there is a hint in the *Annals* to indicate how Dio’s version could have arisen. Tacitus records the opinion of those who believed that Paulina was pleased and grateful that her life had been saved. As the historian points out, discreditable stories are always popular.²¹⁶ It is easy to see how such rumours could be preserved by sources hostile to Seneca. Tacitus, however, goes

²¹² Pliny, *Ep.* III.16.

²¹³ See Appendix A.

²¹⁴ Cassius Dio LXII. 25.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 64.

on to record that Pompeia Paulina spent the few years left of her life as a living ghost, in mourning for her husband and with her health destroyed by the blood loss she had suffered.²¹⁷

If Seneca's last message was as readily available, as Tacitus claims, then his account of the philosopher's last hours can probably be depended upon.²¹⁸ It is unlikely that Tacitus would invent or repeat details that could so easily be challenged by contemporaries. Dio, on the other hand, wrote later and for a largely Greek-speaking audience, an audience that would have had little interest in Latin philosophy. It is unlikely that Dio's Greek readers would have gone to the trouble of reading Seneca's dying words, or indeed any of his works, even if they could read Latin. It is equally unlikely that they were translated into Greek.²¹⁹

Seneca's manner of dying set a fashion that was imitated, amongst others, by Nero's *elegantiae arbiter*, C. Petronius.²²⁰ As described by Tacitus, Petronius' death appears to be a parody of the 'philosophical' suicides, especially that of Seneca. As Seneca had, he dined with friends.²²¹ Like Seneca he slit his veins, or had them slit.²²² Like Seneca he talked with his friends. Like Seneca he died slowly, although in his case this was a deliberate choice.²²³ Not for Petronius the sort of last conversation enjoyed by Seneca²²⁴ and, later, by Thrax.²²⁵ Petronius died as lightly as he had lived.²²⁶ If imitation is a sincere form of flattery, then parody is a sure sign that the target audience is well acquainted with the source of the parody.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁸ ... *pleraque tradidit, quae in uulgus edita eius uerbis...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 63).

²¹⁹ There was a persistent attitude that philosophy should be written in Greek (Griffin, *Seneca*, pp. 7-8).

²²⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 18

²²¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 60. In Seneca's case this was not a deliberate plan; he happened to be at dinner when the death sentence was delivered (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 60, 61). There seems to have been something of a time lag between dinner and Seneca's death. We are told that Gaius Silvanus arrived with a message from Nero while Seneca was dining. Silvanus returned to the emperor with Seneca's reply and was ordered to convey the sentence of death to Seneca (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 61). He did not do so immediately, however. He first made a detour to consult the praetorian prefect, Faenius Rufus (*ibid*) before returning to Seneca's villa. All this must have taken some time, given that Seneca's villa was four miles from Rome (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 60). Presumably his friends were prevented from leaving, even if they had wished to do so, by the guards Silvanus placed about the house (*ibid*).

²²² ...*sed incisas uenas...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 19).

²²³ ...*neque tamen praeceps uitam expulit... ut libitum, obligatos aperire rursum* (Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 19).

²²⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62.

²²⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 34.

²²⁶ ...*et afloqui amicos, non per seria aut quibus gloriam constantiae peteret. audiebatque referentis nihil de immortalitate animal et sapientium placitis, sed leuia carmina et facilis uersus* (Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 19).

2. 7 An Aside

One of the minor irritations of this project has been the apparent inability of many sources, translations and commentaries, to differentiate between arteries and veins. Since Seneca died slowly it is reasonable to assume that a vein was cut rather than an artery. It is even possible that only capillaries were damaged. If the brachial artery had been severed, death would have occurred within minutes. The same applies, of course, to Pompeia Paulina. There was time for a messenger to report to Nero then return with the emperor's command that her life was to be saved.²²⁷ If Seneca and Paulina had cut the brachial artery both would have died from exsanguination before a messenger could have galloped even at full speed to consult Nero, waited for the emperor's decision, then returned with it.

2. 8 Conclusion

Seneca's portrayal in the fictitious correspondence as Christian sympathiser was the perfect rebuttal to pagan gibes that Christianity attracted only the ignorant and powerless. He had been an eminent literary figure before he acquired any real political power. As far as the author of the apocryphal correspondence is concerned, the salient aspect of Seneca's career was his role as Nero's mentor. Given the stress placed on this position by others, including Seneca himself, this is not surprising. The letter writer makes no mention of Seneca's Stoic philosophy; the correspondence presenting him as, at least potentially, a Christian convert. His adherence to the doctrine of the Stoa was, however, known to Christians in the fourth century. St. Jerome notes that Seneca was a follower of the Stoic Sotion.

Seneca's death was more influential than his life or career. He was a victim of Nero, the emperor who was also responsible for the unjust and cruel deaths of many innocent Christians after the fire. Seneca could also be viewed as an innocent victim, or at least not guilty of the crime for which he was condemned. As a further coincidence, pious tradition makes St. Paul another casualty of Neronian persecution. The accident of history that made the apostle Seneca's

²²⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 64.

contemporary was probably more important still. It meant that it was not impossible that the two men could have corresponded and even met in person.

CHAPTER THREE

Senecan Stoicism

haec docuit colere diuina, humana diligere.¹

It was Seneca's moral philosophy that impelled Lactantius to write that *qui uolet scire omnia, Senecae libros in manum sumat*.² Such a recommendation had its effect. It is echoed in the apocryphal correspondence in which the anonymous author describes Seneca as *magister ... omnium*.³ The evidence that Lactantius influenced the letter writer is circumstantial but it is suggestive. It is not clear if the author of the apocryphal correspondence between 'Seneca' and 'St. Paul' was also directly influenced by Seneca's thought. The letters indicate that his level of education was sufficient to allow him to be acquainted with Seneca's works.⁴ They do not establish whether he was so acquainted or whether he derived his information solely from earlier Christian writers who had mentioned Seneca.

The following discussion deals with features of Seneca's philosophical beliefs that could have persuaded this author and other Christians that Seneca's version of Stoic philosophy was compatible with Christianity. The anonymous author of the letters took this evaluation a step further and has his Seneca in friendly contact with St. Paul. The Seneca of the letters is not only interested in the new religion but also sympathetic towards its tenets. Not all Christians were thus convinced. St. Jerome, for example, admired Seneca's *continentissima uita*, but was not won over by his philosophy.⁵

Moral philosophy was Seneca's main field of interest. His chief concern was to learn, and to teach, how to live in the morally correct manner.⁶ He does not deal with such topics that may be

¹ Seneca, *Ep.* XC. 3.

² Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* V. ix. 18.

³ Barlow, *Epistolae*, *Ep.* II.

⁴ See Chapter 4. 8 below.

⁵ *Quem non ponerem in catalogo sanctorum, nisi me illae epistolae prouocarent* (St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII).

⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXIX. 18; ... *munus... philosophiae quod bene uiuimus* (Seneca, *Ep.* XC. 1).

considered relevant to this field as free will and determinism. He has little to say on the composition of the soul, despite the fact that Posidonius, according to Galen, held that instruction about virtues and about the end is tied to teachings about the powers of the soul.⁷ This does not necessarily mean that he was uninterested in these aspects of Stoicism. In fact Seneca stresses the importance of learning about the nature of the soul.⁸

Todd challenges the view that the interest of the later Stoics in practical ethics precluded an interest in physics.⁹ Seneca did, after all, write a lengthy treatise, the *Natural Questions*, which discusses the causes of some physical phenomena. He poses questions about time, for example, although he supplies no answers.

*an per se sit aliquid; ... an aliquid ante tempus sit sine tempore; cum mundo coeperit an etiam ante mundum quia fuerit aliquid, fuerit et tempus.*¹⁰

The nature of the soul, too, calls forth questions rather than answers.

*unde (sc. animus) sit, qualis sit, quando esse incipiat, quamdiu sit; ... utrum corpus sit an non sit; ... an obliviscatur priorum ...*¹¹

It is clear that Seneca considers that these are important problems that are worthy of investigation. Rather than explore them himself, however, he accepted earlier Stoic opinion as background to his own particular field of concern:

*Scis enim me moralem philosophiam uelle conplecti et omnes ad eam pertinentis quaestiones explicare.*¹²

He does, however, issue a warning. The would-be virtuous person must beware of those philosophers who will waste his time as well as their own.¹³ Nausiphanes, for example, maintains that *nihil magis esse quam non esse*;¹⁴ Parmenides holds that nothing exists except the

⁷ Phillip de Lacey (ed. and trans), *Galen: On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*², First Part: Books I-V, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum V 4, 1, 2, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981, p. 329f.

⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 34.

⁹ Robert B. Todd, 'The Stoics and their Cosmology,' *ANRW* II. 36. 3, p. 1375 and note. 56.

¹⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 33-34.

¹¹ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 34.

¹² Seneca, *Ep.* CVI. 2.

¹³ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 42.

¹⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 44.

uniuersus.¹⁵ Zeno of Elea removed all difficulties by declaring that nothing exists, while the Pyrrhonian, Megarian, Eretrian and Academic schools have introduced the new science of non-knowledge.¹⁶ This sort of speculation is even worse than the useless knowledge of the *liberales artes* that Seneca has been criticising shortly before.¹⁷ Such studies do at least produce knowledge, no matter how useless, but the philosophers of the schools just mentioned deny the existence of knowledge.¹⁸ It is this sort of nonsense (nonsense in Seneca's opinion) that provides his rationale for accepting earlier Stoic theory. The late Stoics, including Seneca, assumed Chrysippus' underlying theoretical framework while they concentrated on applied philosophy.¹⁹

It is not possible for each generation to re-examine all the tenets of its predecessors. Some must be accepted so that succeeding generations do not waste their energy revising what has already been done, so failing to move on to new discoveries. Exceptions arise, of course, when new evidence throws doubt on received wisdom. Then both previous theory as well as the new finding must be examined to ascertain which, if either, is correct or at least more credible and best fits the available data.

Seneca believed that the inheritors of earlier wisdom have a duty to increase it as a legacy for their heirs.²⁰ Even if everything has already been discovered, there remain possible new applications for earlier knowledge.²¹

One motive for investigating a received opinion or theory is a dissatisfaction with its perceived shortcomings. Seneca, it would seem, was satisfied with, and accepted the work of, previous generations on physics, free will and determinism, and the soul. It is plausible to argue that this relative lack of speculation on the soul and on cosmology made his work more attractive to early Latin Christianity as his ethical teaching was not so obviously based on ideas incompatible with

¹⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 44 (with translator's note *a* on p. 376 of the LCL edition of Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistolae morales*); *nihil est praeter unum* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 45).

¹⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 44.

¹⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 37f.

¹⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 45.

¹⁹ Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, p. 46.

²⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* LXIV. 7; *N.Q.* VII. 30. 5.

²¹ Seneca, *Ep.* LXIV. 8.

Christian beliefs. It is not to be expected that every thinker in any field make an original contribution to all aspects of that field. Seneca was original in his application of Stoic doctrine to the problem of moral improvement.²²

Wisdom, according to Seneca, should be our real preoccupation.²³ We may indeed speculate on such matters as the nature of the gods, what fuels the constellations, the movements of the stars and whether human affairs are tied to such movement and whether anything happens by chance or whether everything is regulated by strict laws.²⁴ These topics are worthy of investigation, but not for their own sake. They serve as a means of elevating and training the mind for its true task, the acquisition of wisdom.²⁵ Seneca observes with regret that the study of these subjects no longer forms part of instruction in morals.²⁶ A thorough grounding in these fields is desirable so that an individual acquires the ability to make up his own mind. The Stoa was formed of a community of equals who were not required to follow a master.²⁷ In fact the contrary was the case. Children are expected to learn by rote.²⁸ Adults must learn to think for themselves and make their own discoveries that posterity can then extend.²⁹ No new discoveries can be made if all investigation ceases because previous authority must be followed blindly and uncritically.³⁰ Nothing put forward by even the most eminent Stoic should be considered to be above critical examination. There is an obvious tension here with the advice mentioned above, that some teaching must be accepted and built upon. The decision on what to accept and what should be reinvestigated is often difficult.

²² Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics*, p. 154, note 5.

²³ *At nobis in ipsa (sc. sapientia) commorandum est* (Seneca, *Ep.* CXVII. 18-19).

²⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* CXVII. 19.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *Ista iam a formatione morum recesserunt, sed leuant animum et ad ipsarum, quas tractat, rerum magnitudinem attollunt* (Seneca, *Ep.* CXVII. 19).

²⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 7; *non sumus sub rege; sibi quisque se uindicat* (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 4); *nullius nomen fero* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLV. 4).

²⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 7.

²⁹ *ibid; praeterea qui alium sequitur, nihil inuenit, immo nec quaerit...Multum ex illa etiam futuris relictum est* (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 10-11).

³⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 10. Wilson, 'Seneca's *Epistles* Reclassified,' pp. 180f, 182, 184.

The greatest thinkers, in which term Seneca included past Stoics, had been guilty of wasting time in useless quibbling.³¹ Seneca had no hesitation in criticising syllogisms put forward by Zeno himself.³² Nor were his own contemporaries free from this fault.³³ The person who attempted to refute such a syllogism was, in his opinion, behaving just as foolishly as the one who proposed it.³⁴ Any attempt at refutation merely endowed the syllogism with a credibility it would otherwise not possess.

Seneca did not confine himself to the learning of the Stoa but borrowed ideas from every philosophical school, Cynic, Epicurean, Peripatetic, Academic, and welded them together.³⁵ Why, asks Seneca rhetorically, does he quote Epicurus rather than a Stoic master?³⁶ These noble thoughts are common property, Seneca insists, and not the exclusive possession of one man or one school.³⁷ Moreover it is not only philosophy that can utter basic truths. Poets and even the mime can deliver wisdom on occasion.³⁸ Lucilius himself has contributed to the shared stock of wisdom with his *dari bonum quod potuit, auferri potest*.³⁹

3. 1 *De deo et homine*

The Stoics believed that some things have a material existence, while others do not.⁴⁰ Things that do not exist are creatures of the human imagination, like centaurs or giants.⁴¹ Seneca then divides that which exists (*quod est*) into two categories, those with and those without substance (*corpus*).⁴² Substance is either animate (*animans*) or inanimate (*inanimum*).⁴³ Seneca makes a clear-cut division between life and non-life:

³¹ Seneca, *Epp.* XLV. 4-5; CXVII. 20.

³² Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXIII. 8ff; “*nullum malum gloriosum est; mors autem gloriosa est; mors ergo non est malum*” (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXII. 9).

³³ ... *mihi tales quaestiunculas ponis, in quibus ego nec dissentire a nostris salua gratia nec consentire salua conscientia possum* (Seneca, *Ep.* CXVII. 1).

³⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXII. 9-10.

³⁵ Motto, *Seneca*, p. 129.

³⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* VIII. 8.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* VIII. 10.

⁴⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 15.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 14.

*animantia superiorem tenebunt locum, quia et animalia in hac forma sunt et sata. Sed quaedam anima carent, ut saxa.*⁴⁴

The ‘animate’ is further subdivided into *quaedam animum habent* and *quadam tantum animam*.⁴⁵ Those possessing *animum* are clearly animals, those with only *animam* are plants.⁴⁶ The discussion on non-life has been abandoned.

Living creatures derive their very name from the word for ‘soul’.⁴⁷ Thus Seneca recognises an essential similarity between humans and other animals. Moreover there is general agreement on this point: *constat*.⁴⁸ Plants and trees (the distinction is Seneca’s) are also recognised as living things.⁴⁹ It appears that Seneca did not endow the members of the plant kingdom with a soul, but nor does he state that they do not have one. Galen, however, states specifically that the Stoics did not ascribe a soul to plants:

οἱ δὲ Στωϊκοὶ οὐδὲ ψυχὴν ὅλως ὀνομάζουσι τὴν τὰ φυτὰ διοικοῦσαν, ἀλλὰ φύσιν.⁵⁰

Human beings, however, possess a dual essence, a physical nature shared with other animals and a rationality that is peculiar to humanity.⁵¹ *Deus* is present in every human being.⁵² It is this tiny divine spark that separates humanity from the other animals that also possess a soul. Humans are the only form of life to possess this special gift from *deus* that can make them equivalent to the divine, provided they cultivate it correctly. It is this that separates man from beast, not the soul

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 10.

⁴⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 14.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Animum constat animal esse, cum ipse efficiat, ut simus animalia, cum ab illo animalia nomen hoc traxerint* (Seneca, *Ep.* CXIII. 2).

⁴⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* CXIII. 2.

⁴⁹ *Placet enim satis et arbustis animam inesse* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 10).

⁵⁰ Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* VI. 509; von Arnim, *S. V. F.* II. 710.

E. Vernon Arnold (*Roman Stoicism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1911, reissued 1958, p. 189) cites Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 10 as evidence that Seneca believed that non-living objects, such as rocks, possess a soul-like property called ‘cohesion’ (*corpus*).

⁵¹ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVI. 9.

⁵² *Prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLI. 1).

that is common to all living creatures. Only the gods surpass humanity in this quality.⁵³ Reason is a common attribute of both gods and humans.⁵⁴ It is already perfected in the gods, and it can be perfected in human beings.⁵⁵ Seneca also maintains that the difference between humans and gods lies in the immortality of the latter rather than in an intrinsic difference in the gods' rational nature.⁵⁶ At first sight these two assertions appear to contradict each other. Seneca claims, however, that although the gods are rational by nature, humans can strive to emulate them in this respect.⁵⁷ Divine immortality is beyond mortal reach; divine rationality is not.

Seneca uses *deus* and *di* interchangeably. Seneca's *deus* is the supreme ruler of the universe.⁵⁸ The Stoic *deus* is not, however, a personal, anthropomorphic deity like the Christian God. It is a "divine and coherent principle."⁵⁹ It created the universe and is its greatest and most powerful force.⁶⁰ Unlike God, *deus* is not omnipotent.⁶¹ *Deus* cannot, for example, make the universe imperishable and so must protect it from destruction.⁶² Seneca believed that without this guiding hand the universe would perish. There are also other active forces, such as *fata* and *natura*.⁶³ At times Seneca writes of these as if they were to be distinguished from *deus*. Yet in *De beneficiis* he states explicitly that ... *natura... fata, fortuna; omnia eiusdem dei nomina sunt uarie utentis sua potestate*.⁶⁴ The human mind is so constructed that it has the will and the ability to discover these truths.⁶⁵ A comparison with the ideas of Paul Davies is irresistible.⁶⁶

⁵³ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVI. 9.

⁵⁴ *Ratio uero dis hominibusque communis est* (Seneca, *Ep.* XCII. 27); *omnia animalia aut rationalia sunt, ut homines, ut di, aut irrationalia, ut ferae, ut pecora...* (Seneca, *Ep.* CXIII. 17).

⁵⁵ *haec in illis consummata est, in nobis consummabilis...* (Seneca, *Ep.* XCII. 27).

⁵⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* CXXIV. 14.

⁵⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* CXXIV. 21.

⁵⁸ Motto, *Seneca*, p. 64. It is preferable here to retain the Latin. In a culture influenced by the Judaeo-Christian concept of deity it is all too easy to fall into Christian thought-patterns if the word is translated as God or even god.

⁵⁹ ... *siue ille deus est potens omnium, siue incorporalis ratio ingentium operum artifex, siue diuinus spiritus per omnia ... diffusus, siue fatum...* (Seneca, *Ad Heluiam* VIII. 3); Motto, *Seneca*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ *Deus* as creator : Seneca, *Ep.* CXIII. 16; *De otio* IV. 2; *N. Q.* V. xviii. 13; *Ad Heluiam* VIII. 3; as controller: Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 28; LXXI. 12, 14; CVII. 9.

⁶¹ *quicquid est quod nos si uiuere, sic mori iussit, eadem necessitate et deos alligat. Irreuocabilis humana pariter ac diuina cursus uehit. Ille ipse omnium conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit* (Seneca, *De prou.* V. 8).

⁶² *miremur... deumque... et hoc prouidentem, quemadmodum quae immortalia facere non potuit, quia materia prohibebat...* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 27-28).

⁶³ For example, *Ep.* CVII. 9; *De prou.* V. 8; *inaequalibus ista spatiis eodem natura dimittit* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXI. 13).

⁶⁴ Seneca, *De ben.* IV. vii-viii and *N. Q.* II. xlv.

⁶⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* XC. 2; CX. 9.

In Stoic thought the soul is considered to be a material part of the body, not, as Plato had it, a divine being lodged temporarily in the body.⁶⁷ Seneca believed, however, that the soul is of a different substance from that of the body.⁶⁸ It is corporeal, but is not bound by physical laws; its passage out of the body cannot be impeded, for example.⁶⁹ Seneca's opinions on the survival of the soul are inconsistent and contradictory, even within the same work. In an early work, the consolation addressed to Marcia on the death of her son, Seneca seeks to comfort the addressee by assuring her that the punishments supposedly to be feared after death are no more than the inventions of the poets.⁷⁰ There is no post-mortem agony. There is no darkness, no prison, there are no rivers of fire.⁷¹ Death is a release from all suffering. To pity the dead is as pointless as pitying the never-born. Later in the same work, as if fearing that such a doctrine would offer no solace to the bereaved mother, he contradicts this confident assertion. The body is left behind while the 'real person' it sheltered is cleansed of the remains of mortal existence before joining the welcoming *coetus sacer* of *felices animae*.⁷² This sacred assembly includes Marcia's father who instructs his grandson in the secrets of the universe.⁷³ From their abode in the highest reaches of the sky and in their new guise they watch over those left behind.⁷⁴ In Stoic thought, however, immortality is not forever and Seneca ends the consolation in harmony with the teaching of the earlier Stoa. The *felices animae* will be caught up in the general conflagration that will end this age of the universe.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ See, for example, Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics*, London and Melbourne: Dent, 1983, esp. pp. 218-229.

⁶⁷ Veyne, *Seneca. The Life of a Stoic*, p. 121.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *cogita nullis defunctum malis adfici, illa, quae nobis inferos faciunt terribiles, fabulas esse...luserunt ista poetae...*(Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XIX. 4).

⁷¹ *nullas imminere mortuis tenebras nec carcerem nec flumina igne flagrantia* (Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XIX. 4). This opinion is repeated in *Ep.* XXIV. 18 (...*nec Ixionem rota uolui nec saxum umeris Sisyphi trudi in aduersum nec ullius uiscera et renasci posse cotidie et carpi; nemo tam puer est, ut Cerberum timeat et tenebras et larualem habitum nudis ossibus cohaerentium*).

⁷² Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XXV. 1

⁷³ *...parens tuus, Marcia. Ille nepotem suum ... uicinorum siderum meatus docet...*(Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XXV. 2).

⁷⁴ *iuuat enim ex alto relictas respicere. Sic itaque te, Marcia, gere, tamquam sub oculis patris filique posita, non illorum, quos noueras, sed tanto excelsiorum et in summo locorum* (Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XXV. 3).

⁷⁵ *Nos quoque felices animae et aeterna sortitae, cum deo uisum erit iterum ista moliri, labentibus cunctis et ipsae parua ruinae ingentis accessio in antiqua elementa uertemur* (Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XXVI. 7).

It is inconceivable that as he composed the *consolatio* Seneca simply forgot that earlier in the same work he had denied the idea of individual survival after death. It is equally incredible that he decided that this was too bleak a prospect to offer a bereaved mother and so gave her the optimistic picture of the spiritual survival not only of her recently dead son but also of her father who had predeceased him. If that had been the case he would have erased the earlier passage. It is not one of the aims of this thesis to attempt a reconciliation of Senecan inconsistencies, but some attempt at an explanation seems called for in this instance. Motto suggests that Seneca is making a distinction between the fate of the souls of the great mass of humanity and those of the wise.⁷⁶ There are hints that this could be the case. Seneca heaps praise on Marcia's son. Despite his youth he had the wisdom of age, and was morally faultless,⁷⁷ although some of virtues singled out for mention are not obviously Stoic. Seeking wealth even without greed or honours without ostentation and certainly pleasures, even without excess,⁷⁸ are not the traits to be expected in a Stoic *sapiens*. Another explanation is suggested in the following discussion involving some of the letters to Lucilius and Seneca's *De consolatio ad Polybium*.

This *consolatio* is addressed to Claudius' influential freedman, Polybius. It is one of the few Senecan works that can be dated with any confidence. It was written during his exile on Corsica and close to the time of Claudius' British triumph in 43.⁷⁹ Seneca sets out the same views on the post-mortem fate of the soul that were presented in the earlier work addressed to Marcia.⁸⁰ Either the dead have no existence and feel nothing, desire nothing and suffer nothing, having returned to the state they were in before they were born,⁸¹ or the soul rejoices at its freedom from the constraints of its earth-bound body and thus unburdened is free to study matters human and divine.⁸² In keeping with the ostensible purpose of the work, as a consolation to the bereaved, and its actual purpose, to persuade Polybius to exert his influence in having him recalled from exile, Seneca stresses the latter possibility. It is plausible to believe that he felt that the grieving

⁷⁶ Motto, 'Seneca on Death and Immortality', *Classical Journal* 50: 4 (1955), pp. 188-189.

⁷⁷ Seneca, *Ad Marciam* XXIII. 3.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Motto suggests 43-44 (*Seneca*, 'Chronology of the Senecan Corpus').

⁸⁰ *Si illius nomine doleo, necesse est alterutrum ex his duobus esse iudicem* (Seneca, *Ad Polybium* IX. 2).

⁸¹ Seneca, *Ad Polybium* IX. 2.

⁸² Seneca, *Ad Polybium* IX. 3.

family would consider this the more optimistic belief. He describes the blissful existence enjoyed by the soul of Polybius' brother.⁸³

The evidence of his letters to Lucilius, written during the last few years of his life, shows that he was unable to resolve the question. He states that the soul is immortal, provided that it survives the death of the body.⁸⁴ The qualification demonstrates Seneca's level of uncertainty. In another letter he suggests that this life is a preparation for another, like time spent in utero before birth,⁸⁵ and to continue the metaphor, *dies iste* (i.e. that of one's death) *aeterni natalis est*.⁸⁶ This has such a Christian ring to it that it is no wonder some Christians believed that Seneca must have been influenced by Christian thought.

He was optimistic about an after-life such as he describes to both Marcia and Polybius. *Et fortasse, si modo uera sapientium fama est recipitque nos locus aliquis*,⁸⁷ but remains uncertain. Death either annihilates us or strips us bare.⁸⁸ By that Seneca means that once the body has been removed, the soul, the essential person, is free of the burden tying it to an earthly life. More telling, provided the account is genuine, are his reflections during an asthma attack when he thought he was dying.⁸⁹ He comforted himself with the reflection that being dead is exactly the same as being unborn.⁹⁰ In an earlier letter Seneca stated that although everything appears to perish in reality it merely changes.⁹¹ Death interrupts life rather than ending it.⁹² The dead will be restored to life in the new cycle of the universe, but they will have no memory of their former existence.⁹³

⁸³ Seneca, *Ad Polybium* IX. 4f.

⁸⁴ *si (sc. animus) superstes est corpori, opteri illum nullo genere posse* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVII. 9 in C. D. N. Costa [ed], *Seneca, 17 Letters*, Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris and Phillips, 1988, p. 44).

⁸⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* CII. 23.

⁸⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* CII. 26.

⁸⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* LXIII. 16.

⁸⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* XXIV. 18.

⁸⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* LIV. 4-5.

⁹⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* LIV. 5.

⁹¹ ... *omnia, quae uidentur perire, mutari* (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXVI. 11).

⁹² ... *mors ... intermittit uitam, non eripit* (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXVI. 10).

⁹³ *ueniet iterum, qui nos in lucem reponat dies, quem multi recusarent, nisi oblitos reduceret* (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXVI. 10).

It is the belief that mortals share a rational nature with the gods, just as a physical nature is common to people, animals and even plants, which can lead Seneca to a belief in the divine nature of the *sapiens*.⁹⁴ It is this rational facility, the gift of *deus*, that allows human beings to claim a relationship with eternal reason, the force governing the universe.⁹⁵ It also provides the basis for the fellowship of all humanity. This aspect of Seneca's thought is attractive to Christians of any time.

3. 2 Love thy neighbour

No one else in the Graeco-Roman world gave the same importance Seneca did to the obligations owed to one's fellow human beings, simply because they are human beings:⁹⁶

*Hoc primum philosophia promittit, sensum communem, humanitatem et congregationem.*⁹⁷

All human beings are entitled to an expectation of certain rights by virtue of a common humanity.⁹⁸ Conversely, a duty is owed to others on the same grounds. One must have the same care for another as one has for oneself.⁹⁹ This attitude to other human beings must transcend the narrow boundaries of one's own city and be extended to the entire world. Seneca asks rhetorically,

*Quis enim liberalitatem tantum ad togatos uocat? Hominibus prodesse natura me iubet. Serui liberine sint hi, ingenui an libertini, iustae libertatis an inter amicos datae, quid refert?*¹⁰⁰

Seneca's question may be compared to St. Paul's exhortation to the Galatians, "*non est Iudaeus neque Graecus: non est seruus neque liber: non est masculus neque femina.*"¹⁰¹ Paul repeats the sentiment in his letter to the Colossians, but with an addition, *sed omnia et in omnibus Christus*,

⁹⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* XCII. 29-30; *si hominem uideris interritum periculis, intactum cupiditatibus, inter aduersa felicem, in mediis tempestatibus placidum, ex superiore loco homines uidentem, ex aequo deos...* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLI. 4); *dedit tibi illa [sc. philosophia], quae ... par deo surges* (Seneca, *Ep.* XXXI. 9).

⁹⁵ Motto, *Seneca*, p. 50.

⁹⁶ *Homo in adiutorium mutuum genitus est* (Seneca, *De ira* I. v. 2); Motto, *Seneca*, p. 56.

⁹⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* V. 4.

⁹⁸ ... *aliquod esse commune ius generis humani...* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLVIII. 3).

⁹⁹ *Ep.* XCV. 52-53; ... *alteri uiuas oportet, si uis tibi uiuere* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLVIII. 2).

¹⁰⁰ Seneca, *De uita beata* XXIV. 3.

¹⁰¹ St. Paul, *Ad Galatas* 3. 28.

that suggests that these differences vanish for those who believe in Jesus as Christ.¹⁰² Seneca claimed to see no differences.

There is no suggestion that Seneca influenced St. Paul or that Paul influenced Seneca's thought, or that either one knew of the other's existence, let alone teaching. Both drew on common sources to which each added his own peculiar contribution. A glimpse is thus provided of the extent of a general inheritance. Paul was a Hellenised Jew and a Pharisee, born in Tarsus and educated, at least in part, in Jerusalem, who came to accept that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Seneca was probably of Roman or Italian descent, born in Cordoba and educated at Rome, who became a Stoic philosopher. He was a senator and for a time the most powerful figure in the Roman empire. It was this empire that provided the conditions under which these men of different background, education and religious belief could yet share a common heritage. Christians in following centuries were impressed by the perception of Christian belief in Seneca's work. This perception inclined them to accept aspects of his ethical philosophy. It was all the more likely in the case of those who were convinced that there had been a personal connection between Seneca and St. Paul.

In Seneca's eyes it is an accident of birth that causes any individual to be a citizen of this or that state.¹⁰³ A person's true citizenship is of the entire world and that citizenship includes gods as well as mortals.¹⁰⁴ Earlier Greek Stoics were generally agreed that the wise man's citizenship was of no importance, but they confined their discussion on this point to the σοφός, who is as rare as the phoenix. They exclude the vast bulk of humanity from consideration on the grounds that friendship can only exist amongst the wise.¹⁰⁵ They define friendship in part as treating a friend as one would oneself.¹⁰⁶ Bad men, however, can have no friends.¹⁰⁷ The inescapable conclusion, then, is that the wise man is not obliged to assist such people in any way, since mutual assistance is to be confined to friends. Seneca has widened this narrow doctrine and

¹⁰² *ubi non est gentiles et Iudaeus, circumcisio et praeputium, barbarus et Scytha, seruus et liber (Epistula ad Colossenses 3. 11).*

¹⁰³ *... alteram (rem publicam), cui nos adscripsit condicio nascendi (Seneca, De otio IV. 1).*

¹⁰⁴ Seneca, *De otio* IV. 1.

¹⁰⁵ D.L. VII. 124.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

insists that it is the duty of any human being to care for any other human being. All that is required is that one needs help, the other is in a position to provide that help, and both are humans.

Seneca demanded kindness, leniency and control of anger and arrogance when dealing with others, especially the less fortunate.¹⁰⁸ The acts of kindness and generosity one performs must not be boasted of.¹⁰⁹ They must be freely given, as if they were the entitlement of the recipient, as indeed they are, rather than charity to be humbly and gratefully acknowledged.¹¹⁰ The *sapiens* will not insult those in need of aid by flinging money at them while shrinking from any contact.¹¹¹

Seneca thus sets out clearly and plainly the duties he sees as being owed by human beings to each other. His admonitions are clear and plain and not subject to multiple interpretations. Jesus, on the other hand, employed a parabolic method, familiar to his original audience, but open to various interpretations by those of different culture and religion. Jews were renowned in the Graeco-Roman world for their intra-communal charity.¹¹² Christians inherited this tradition. At first they followed the Jewish custom of confining charity within their own religious community. Paul's admonitions to his various correspondents seem to refer to charity towards each other. It is not that he advises them to turn inward. On the contrary they are to be open and welcoming to all. He urged his groups to continue to interact with the wider society.¹¹³ Christians are to behave in such a way as to be admirable to outsiders.¹¹⁴ The obvious motive in an evangelical movement is to attract converts and welcoming newcomers to Christian gatherings can assist the accomplishment of this goal.¹¹⁵ Christians are admonished not to behave in such a fashion that

¹⁰⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXXVIII. 30; Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ Seneca, *De ben.* II. x-xi.

¹¹⁰ Seneca, *De ben.* II. xi. 2; *De clem.* I. i. 3-4;... *ut homo homini ex communi dabit...* (*De clem.* II. vi. 2); Motto, *Seneca*, p. 59.

¹¹¹ ... *non hanc (sci.stipem) contumeliosam... abicit et fastidit, quos adiuuat, contingique ab iis timet...* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. vi. 2).

¹¹² Tacitus, *Histories* V. 5, Juvenal, *Satires* XIV. 103-104, for example.

¹¹³ 1 Cor. 5. 9-13; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 105f.

¹¹⁴ 1 Thess. 4. 11f; Col. 4. 5; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, p. 106.

¹¹⁵ 1 Cor. 10. 32; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, p. 106.

enquirers are put off.¹¹⁶ Charity, however, seems to have been extended only to those who had become believers in Christ. A century after Paul's time Hermas is critical of wealthy Christians who do not assist their poorer brethren.¹¹⁷ There is no mention of extending Christian charity to the wider community. Lactantius also stresses the ideal of intra-communal Christian charity.¹¹⁸ It was one of the strengths of their movement and became more important and more attractive in following centuries as Christians extended charity to all. This had certainly occurred by the middle of the fourth century, probably some time before.¹¹⁹ The Emperor Julian recognised the value of Christian philanthropy and exhorted pagan priests to imitate Christian care for the poor.¹²⁰ He was even inclined to attribute the success of Christianity in attracting converts to their charitable work.¹²¹

Salzman writes that, "without a doubt, church leaders were advocating an important change in behaviour concerning charity. It is one thing to give beneficently to friends, relations, clients, and fellow citizens, quite another to donate to the poor."¹²² Salzman goes on to point out that the traditional euergetism of the aristocrat remained "donor-centred" but was given a Christian face.¹²³ Wealthy Christians would reap a spiritual reward in the after-life rather than the this-worldly reward of prestige or political influence.

Seneca had, in fact, proposed charity to all:

*quis enim liberalitatem tantum ad togatos uocat? Hominibus prodesse natura me iubet.
Serui liberine sint hi, ingenui an libertini ... quid refert? Ubicumque homo est, ibi
benefici locus est.*¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ 1 Cor. 14. 23; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, p. 106.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter 5. 5 below.

¹¹⁸ See p. 168 below.

¹¹⁹ Neither Hermas nor Proba, however, acknowledged a duty to the wider community (Hermas: Chapter 5. 5 below; Proba: p. 245 below).

¹²⁰ Julian, *To Arsacius, High-priest of Galatia* 430 D, *Fragment of a Letter to a Priest* 290 D, 305 B-C; Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p.179.

¹²¹ Julian, *Fragment of a Letter to a Priest* 305 C.

¹²² Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 208.

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Seneca, *De uita beata*, XXIV. 3.

Here Seneca advocates charity to all those who may be in need, citizen, non-citizen, slave, free or freed. It should make no difference. The important point is that one party is in need and the wealthy individual can supply that need. The donor moreover should remain anonymous;¹²⁵ he is making a gift, not an investment,¹²⁶ whether in this world or in the next. The donor should not only be unknown to the recipient he must remain unknown to others also. His charity should ideally be known only to himself.¹²⁷ He is seeking neither applause nor gratitude.

Whether Seneca practised what he preached is another question. He did have a reputation in antiquity for generosity, but the men who sing his praises are the poets Juvenal¹²⁸ and Martial,¹²⁹ members of a profession that someone of Seneca's status was expected to support.

Christians familiar with the reading of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan as an exhortation to assist another, regardless of status or ethnicity, would have recognised its similarity to Seneca's concept of the unity of humanity. The parable refers to the duty of care owed to one's neighbour, but leaves the definition of 'neighbour' open to interpretation.

Conversely, pagans who applauded Seneca's ideas on the duty owed to a fellow human being would recognise the similarity of the Christian analysis of the parable to the humanitarian ideals of Seneca.

3. 3 On Suicide

Even such a brief survey of Seneca's philosophy as that presented here cannot ignore his ideas on the taking of one's own life. These views were known to some Christian authors, Tertullian and Lactantius for example. They did not, apparently, provoke the adverse reaction that would be expected in later, Christian, times. There is no evidence to indicate whether the anonymous

¹²⁵ *ego illi non sum indicaturus me dedisse* (Seneca, *De ben.* II. x. 4).

¹²⁶ Seneca, *De beneficiis* II. x. 2

¹²⁷ *Ne aliis quidem narrare debemus* (Seneca, *De ben.* II. xi. 2).

¹²⁸ *Nemo petit, modicis quae mittebantur amicis*
a Seneca ...

- Juvenal 5. 108f.

¹²⁹ Martial, *Epigram* XII. xxxvi.

author of the correspondence supposedly exchanged between Seneca and St. Paul knew anything of Seneca's views on suicide. The topic is not raised in the letters.

Seneca's advocacy of suicide, even hedged as it is by various restrictions, would seem to disqualify him as an object of Christian admiration.¹³⁰ The topic was not new with Seneca; he was elaborating on the Stoic position on the subject of suicide.

It has been suggested that there was a morbid or neurotic aspect to Seneca's personality,¹³¹ even that he was "in love with death."¹³² Seneca's ideas on suicide do not provide evidence for such a diagnosis. Death is part of life. It is its final act. It therefore seems not unreasonable that a person interested in the ethics that made a good life should also be concerned with what contributed to a good end to that life. Seneca did not introduce the topic into Stoicism; he expanded on earlier thought. According to Diogenes Laertius the Stoics believed that the σοφός would take his own life under certain circumstances.¹³³ These included giving up his life for his country or his friends, or because he was suffering from intolerable pain, mutilation, or incurable disease.¹³⁴ Seneca expands on Diogenes' report on the Stoic view of suicide: he would not kill himself because he was in pain, provided the pain was not incurable,¹³⁵ not from fear that he would be unable to bear pain, but because of the fear that it could compromise his very reason for living. Seneca advocates the prolonging of life, in spite pain or terminal illness, if continued existence is necessary to help a friend.

Motto suggests that it was Seneca's poor health that caused him to dwell on death and only the thought of his father's anguish that prevented him from taking his own life.¹³⁶ He continued to live only because his father needed him. This theory does not hold up under closer examination. The elder Seneca died in 39. His son's ill health continued to plague him. Yet he did not kill

¹³⁰ See Appendix A.

¹³¹ See, for example, Nicole Tadic-Gilloteaux, 'Sénèque face au suicide,' *L' Antiquité Classique* 32 (1963): 541-551; J. M Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 246.

¹³² Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, p. 249.

¹³³ D.L. VII. 130.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 35-36.

¹³⁶ Motto, "Seneca on Death and Immortality," p. 187.

himself. It should also be noted that this episode belongs (probably) to Seneca's early manhood.¹³⁷ He writes about it in a later work written towards the end of his life.¹³⁸ Seneca, in fact, does not approve of suicide merely because of ill health. This might perhaps be another example of inconsistency. It might also be a conclusion of more mature thought. As a young man he contemplated suicide because he was so ill; as an older man he had come to the conclusion that ill health alone was not sufficient a motive. Continued existence had to be so distressing that there was no possibility of what we might term reasonable quality of life.¹³⁹ In fact Seneca considers it an act of cowardice to die because one cannot bear a little pain.¹⁴⁰ Long lasting pain that interferes with one's very reason for living is another matter.¹⁴¹ To continue to live in order to demonstrate that one can endure the pain is an act of folly.¹⁴² In Seneca's version of Stoic ethics one is living only if he is useful to others and to himself.¹⁴³

*hoc nempe ab homine exigitur, ut prosit hominibus, si fieri potest, multis, si minus, paucis, si minus, proximis, si minus, sibi.*¹⁴⁴

The order here is interesting but not at all surprising. One's first duty is to all humanity. Only if prevented from assisting all should one narrow one's focus.

What all this means turns largely on the definition of 'useful.' Francois, quoted by Tadic-Gilloteaux, interprets it as meaning "to be of service and be useful in enhancing and perfecting the morals of all reasonable beings" and "to ensure that you profit most by the use of your mind."¹⁴⁵ Seneca himself held that there were times when one should continue to live even if one were suffering so much that death would be welcome.¹⁴⁶ A duty is owed to those we love.¹⁴⁷ The

¹³⁷ See p.85 above.

¹³⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVIII. 2.

¹³⁹ *Morbum morte non fugiam, dumtaxat sanabilem nec officientem animo. Non adferam mihi manus propter dolorem; sic mori uinci est* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 36).

¹⁴⁰ *Inbecillus est et ignavus, qui propter dolorem moritur...* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 36).

¹⁴¹ ... *sed quia impedimento mihi futurus est ad omne, propter quod uiuitur* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 36).

¹⁴² ... *stultus, qui doloris causa uiuit...* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 36); *quidne exeat... si nihil aliud quam dolori operam dabit* (Seneca, *Ep.* XCVIII. 16).

¹⁴³ *Viuit is, qui multis usui est, uiuit is, qui se utitur* (Seneca, *Ep.* LX. 4); ... *si nemo iam uti eo poterit* (Seneca, *Ep.* XCVIII. 16).

¹⁴⁴ Seneca, *De otio* III. 5.

¹⁴⁵ ... *c'est-à-dire servir, être utile au perfectionnement moral des êtres raisonnables. ... c'est-à-dire user constamment de sa raison* (Tadic-Gilloteaux, 'Sénèque face au suicide,' p. 544).

¹⁴⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* CIV. 3.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

young Seneca did not kill himself at a time of physical suffering due to ill health because of a reluctance to be the cause of his father's grief. By the time his father died he had either recovered sufficiently from his illness to decide that he could continue with life or he had concluded that he was able to bear his ill health without compromising his way of life.

A good man, according to Seneca, should live not as long as pleases him, but as long as he ought.¹⁴⁸ St. Paul expresses a similar thought. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."¹⁴⁹ This passage appears to suggest that Paul had been contemplating the possibility of his own imminent death at the time it was written.¹⁵⁰

Houlden admits to confusion over these passages.¹⁵¹ Paul writes as if he were potentially facing the death penalty, although this impression contradicts an earlier implication that he was regarded as inoffensive.¹⁵² Collange offers a discussion that is, however, unhelpful on the point in which I am interested.¹⁵³ If Paul is facing a trial that will end in either his acquittal or condemnation, then it is not clear how he can claim to have a choice in the outcome.¹⁵⁴ Collange suggests that the decision he had to make was whether or not to reveal his citizenship status.¹⁵⁵ As a Roman citizen he would (at least in theory) be protected from summary execution.¹⁵⁶ Lightfoot maintains that the tense used by Paul "denotes not the act of dying but the

¹⁴⁸ Seneca *Ep.* CIV. 3; ... *bono uiro uiuendum sit non quamdiu uiuat sed quamdiu oportet* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVIII. 2).

¹⁴⁹ Philippians 1: 21-24.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur J. Droge, 'Mori Lucrum: Paul and Ancient Theories of Suicide, *Nouum Testamentum*, XXX. 3 (1988): p. 280; Arthur J Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death. Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*, San Francisco: Harper, 1992, p.119f.

¹⁵¹ J. H. Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison. Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians*, the Pelican New Testament Commentaries, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p. 61.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Jean-François Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians*, translated from the first French edition by A. W. Heathcote, London: Epworth Press, 1979, pp. 62-69.

¹⁵⁴ Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Hawthorne offers a discussion on the place of writing, concluding with the assumption that St. Paul was writing from prison in Caesarea (Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983, pp. xxxvi-xliv).

consequences of dying, the state after death.”¹⁵⁷ It is not clear why Paul should be contemplating his own death at this point. Although he is in prison he is not, apparently, in danger of the death penalty. Yet he welcomes the prospect of death, giving the impression that he is free to choose whether he lives or dies. He hesitates only because he believes that his correspondents need him. Since he appears to be in no danger of execution it is not obvious how or why he thinks he is about to die. The passages seem to apply to the time of writing, not to a more distant future when Paul could expect death in the natural course of events. Perhaps it is simply that he is physically and emotionally exhausted by constant travelling, the debilitating effects of imprisonment and the stress caused by the machinations of his various opponents.¹⁵⁸ He decides in favour of life because he is needed, a Stoic-sounding conclusion. Such a motive would resonate with Christians, or would-be Christians, who had been exposed to Stoic philosophy, especially as set out in the pages of Seneca.

To return to the discussion of Seneca’s ideas on suicide: as he so often does, Seneca appears to contradict himself in another letter. Often one must leave off bravely, he claims in *Ep.* LXXVII.¹⁵⁹ The reasons that hold us to life are not momentous so the reasons that cause us to die need not be momentous either.¹⁶⁰ Nor must life be purchased at any price.¹⁶¹ Seneca obeyed this imperative at the end of his own life by disclaiming any knowledge of the conspiracy for which he was condemned and by refusing to implicate any of the conspirators. The choice is not between dying earlier or later but of dying well or badly.¹⁶² To die well means freedom from the risk of living badly.¹⁶³ Seneca did not agree with the concept that while there is life there is also hope.¹⁶⁴ It is, however, foolish to anticipate an executioner.¹⁶⁵ Socrates calmly awaited his death in prison without seeking to kill himself before the arrival of the hemlock. He did this not in

¹⁵⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul: Epistle to the Philippians*, a revised text with introduction, notes and dissertations, London: MacMillan, 1908, p. 92, note to v. 21.

¹⁵⁸ e.g. Philippians 1. 17; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, pp. xlii, 34, 37-38, 44, 45ff.

¹⁵⁹ *Saepe autem et fortiter desinendum est...*(Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 4).

¹⁶⁰ *... et non ex maximis causis; nam nec eae maximae sunt, quae nos tenent* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 4).

¹⁶¹ *... non omni pretio uita emenda est* (Seneca, *Ep.*LXX. 7).

¹⁶² *Citius mori aut tardius ad rem non pertinet, bene mori aut male ad rem pertinet* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 6).

¹⁶³ *Bene autem mori est effugere male uiuendi periculum* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 6).

¹⁶⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 7.

¹⁶⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 8.

hope of a reprieve, but to demonstrate his obedience to the law and to provide a shining example to his friends.¹⁶⁶ And, one might add, to a distant posterity, including Seneca himself. Seneca also praises another man, a man of his own time and culture, whom he knew personally. This is Aufidius Bassus, an old man nearing the end of his life by natural means, not under sentence of death by his fellows.¹⁶⁷ Bassus, too, awaited his death tranquilly. Seneca admires him not only for this attitude but also because he did not long for death out of a hatred for life.¹⁶⁸ He recognised death as an inescapable part of life.¹⁶⁹ According to Seneca the brave and wise man (and Bassus is obviously, in his opinion, one such) dies not from a love of death but because it is his time to go.¹⁷⁰ The attitude of those Christian martyrs who so longed to die would have been alien to Seneca.¹⁷¹ He could, however, have understood the imperative driving martyrs who chose to die rather than continue to live shamefully, even if their concept of a shameful life, that is, honouring the gods of Rome, would have been incomprehensible.¹⁷²

Having praised those who calmly await death but refuse to anticipate it, Seneca turns to a person of a different sort. This is a young man named Drusus Libo.¹⁷³ Expecting a sentence of death Libo considered suicide.¹⁷⁴ His aunt Scribonia attempted to dissuade him, using an argument similar to that of Seneca.

*Cui Scribonia: "Quid te," inquit, "delectat alienum negotium agere?"*¹⁷⁵

Libo, however, ignored her advice and committed suicide.¹⁷⁶ In view of Seneca's position as described above it is surprising to find him now championing a different policy. He maintains that Libo acted correctly.¹⁷⁷ If one is doomed to die shortly at the pleasure of an enemy, it is

¹⁶⁶ Seneca, *Ep* LXX. 9.

¹⁶⁷ Seneca, *Ep*. XXX. 1-2.

¹⁶⁸ ... *plus momenti apud me habent, qui ad mortem ueniunt sine odio uitae...* (Seneca, *Ep*. XXX. 15).

¹⁶⁹ Seneca, *Ep*. XXX. 10.

¹⁷⁰ *Vir fortis ac sapiens non fugere debet e uita sed exire. Et ante omnia ille quoque uitetur affectus, qui multos occupauit, libido moriendi* (Seneca, *Ep*. XXIV. 25).

¹⁷¹ See Appendix A.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ Seneca, *Ep*. LXX. 10.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Seneca, *Ep*. LXX. 10.

doing that enemy's bidding to adhere to his timetable.¹⁷⁸ This stance appears to contradict his advice in the same letter that one should not anticipate the executioner. The recommendations, however, are only apparently contradictory. They amount to an instruction to die at a time of one's own choosing rather than at another's bidding. Seneca himself was unable to follow his own counsel. He was forced to kill himself at Nero's command. Dio's account tells us what would have happened had he refused the imperial command. One of the attending soldiers would have killed him. This in fact might have meant a quicker and possibly more merciful death than the drawn out agony he was forced to endure according to Tacitus' report.¹⁷⁹

Seneca maintains that no general prescription can be made on deciding the proper time for any individual to die. Each case must be judged on its merits.¹⁸⁰ Implicit in Seneca's approval of the two opposing decisions is the contrast between the lives of the men involved. Socrates had lived a life worthy of his death. He could contribute much even from prison. He spent his last month in useful activity. Libo, on the other hand, was as stupid as he was aristocratic and possessed of ambitions far beyond his abilities.¹⁸¹ He could not have succeeded in improving himself in the brief time left to him. His only hope of salvaging something worthwhile from a useless life was to choose his own time and method of dying and thus die well.¹⁸² This is a surprisingly Cynic strain in the thought of the usually urbane Seneca, reminiscent of Diogenes the Cynic's characteristically terse *εἰς τὸν βίον παρεσκευάσθαι δεῖν λόγον ἢ βρόχον*.¹⁸³

Griffin writes that, "Cato's death was the perfect act."¹⁸⁴ It was voluntary, fearless and required no outside help.¹⁸⁵ Seneca's own death owed more to Socrates than to Cato. It was not voluntary; like Socrates he was condemned to death, as he himself did not hesitate to acknowledge.¹⁸⁶ His

¹⁷⁸ *Nam post diem tertium aut quartum inimici moriturus arbitrio si uiuuit, alienum negotium agit* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 10).

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter 2. 4.

¹⁸⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 11.

¹⁸¹ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 10.

¹⁸² *Prope est a timente, qui fatum segnis expectat...* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 32). This passage refers to choosing to grow old in wretchedness. It is also applicable to Libo's situation.

¹⁸³ D. L. VI. 24.

¹⁸⁴ Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics*, p. 190.

¹⁸⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* XXIV. 6-7; *De prou.* II. 10.

¹⁸⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 61. *neque aliud superesse post matrem fratremque interfectos quam ut educatoris praeceptorisque necem adiceret* (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62).

end was as courageous as he could have hoped.¹⁸⁷ Seneca's death provides another piece of evidence against the idea that he was in love with death. He had to be ordered to die. The hint that his death was expected was insufficient to cause him to kill himself.¹⁸⁸

3. 4 On Duty

Seneca's ideas on duty have already been touched on. In his *De tranquillitate animi* he sets out the thoughts of Athenodorus on the subject of being useful to oneself and humanity at large.¹⁸⁹ Theoretically the best way is to become involved in public affairs.¹⁹⁰ But in this difficult and dangerous world Athenodorus recommends withdrawal into private life.¹⁹¹ The retiree should, however, be prepared to benefit the individual and the whole of humanity with both advice and instruction.¹⁹² The person who devotes himself to private study is just as valuable as the one who undertakes a public career, provided he is accessible to his fellows. Athenodorus did not advocate a complete withdrawal from society.¹⁹³

Seneca is critical of what he considers to be Athenodorus' hasty surrender.¹⁹⁴ It is certainly true that retirement is sometimes necessary.¹⁹⁵ If so, it should be done gradually as a retreat in good order, not as a rout.¹⁹⁶ Moreover it is not only in his own city that a man can exercise *uirtus*. The entire world is open to anyone who is willing to extend his horizons beyond the confines of his homeland.¹⁹⁷ He must, however, be willing to serve in any capacity.¹⁹⁸ Not everybody can be general or consul. The wise man will not enter upon a course for which he is ill suited, just as he

¹⁸⁷ See Chapter 2. 4 for a fuller discussion of Seneca's death.

¹⁸⁸ (*Nero*) *interrogat an Seneca uoluntariam mortem pararet* (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 61).

¹⁸⁹ Seneca, *De tranq.* III. 3; John W. Basore's (trans.) Seneca, *Moral Essays*, vol. II, Loeb Classical Library, p. 222, note a.

¹⁹⁰ ... *rei publicae tractatione et officiis ciuilibus...* (Seneca, *De tranq.* III. 1).

¹⁹¹ Seneca, *De tranq.* III. 2.

¹⁹² Seneca, *De tranq.* III. 2-3.

¹⁹³ Seneca, *De tranq.* III. 7.

¹⁹⁴ Seneca, *De tranq.* IV. 1.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Seneca, *De tranq.* IV. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Seneca, *De tranq.* IV. 5.

would not put to sea in an unsound ship.¹⁹⁹ A good citizen will serve wherever and whenever he is called on.²⁰⁰ If he should be so unfortunate as to live in times when service to the state is perilous he should devote more time to study than he otherwise would.²⁰¹ It is most important that everyone evaluate his own capabilities correctly and not attempt a task of which he is incapable.²⁰² If someone is by nature better suited to private study than public affairs then it is far better for him, and for others, that he follow his natural bent.

Athenodorus supplies an answer to the question that bedevilled Romans like Tacitus and the younger Pliny: can a good man serve a bad regime? Athenodorus' answer is "no." This is the conclusion to which his argument leads. A good man would retire from public life rather than associate himself with an evil government. Such an argument would have been a bitter pill for a member of the elite orders from which the Roman senate was drawn. Family background and upbringing encouraged participation in public affairs. These groups had a 'born to rule' mindset, especially those of senatorial background. Seneca supplies a rationale for the Roman view. When he feels that an unworthy act is expected of him he retires to private study.²⁰³ But when he reads of noble examples his ambition to be of service is renewed and he returns to public life to assist in any way he can.²⁰⁴

Seneca himself resolved to embark on a public career as commanded by early leaders of the Stoa.²⁰⁵ None of them, as he observes, had followed his own advice.²⁰⁶ All of them had urged others to do so.²⁰⁷ His motivation was not, of course, to acquire honour and glory, but to be of

¹⁹⁹ ... *quomodo nauem quassam non deduceret in mare, sic ad iter, quod inhabile sciet, non accedet* (Seneca, *De otio* III. 4).

²⁰⁰ *Numquam inutilis est opera cuius boni; auditus uisusque, uoltu, nutu, obstinatione tacita incessuque ipso prodest* (Seneca, *De tranq.* IV. 6).

²⁰¹ Seneca, *De tranq.* V. 5; *De otio* III. 3-4.

²⁰² Seneca, *De tranq.* VI. 2-4.

²⁰³ ... *ubi aliquid occurrit aut indignum, ut in omni uita humana multa sunt, aut parum ex facili fluens, aut multum temporis res non magno aestimandae poposcerunt, ad otium conuertor...* (Seneca, *De tranq.* I. 11).

²⁰⁴ *Sed ubi lectio fortior erexit animum et aculeos subdiderunt exempla nobilia, prosilire libet in forum, commodare alteri uocem, alteri operam, etiam si nihil profuturam, tamen conaturam prodesse, alicuius coercere in foro superbiam male secundis rebus elati* (Seneca, *De tranq.* I. 12).

²⁰⁵ *Placet imperia praeceptorum sequi et in mediam ire rem publicam* (Seneca, *De tranq.* I. 10).

²⁰⁶ Seneca, *De tranq.* I. 10.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

service.²⁰⁸ It could be argued that Seneca did follow this course in his own career. It must be admitted that his public career was low-key, although it did include the highest office, that of consul. His position of real influence, that of *amicus principis* to Nero, was unofficial and perhaps even unknown to most outside court circles.

True to his promise, Seneca continued to work after his retirement. He claimed that he was writing for posterity.²⁰⁹ His advice was like a medicine that arrests disease, even if it does not cure it.²¹⁰ It could be inferred that Seneca had given up on his own contemporaries, pinning his hopes on later generations.

In accordance with Stoic principles Seneca married and appears to have fathered at least one child, who died young.²¹¹ The child's mother might also have died at the same time.²¹² It is unclear whether Pompeia Paulina,²¹³ whom he mentions in his letters to Lucilius, and who attempted to die with him, was his first or his second wife.

3. 5 On “the Bloody Games”

Seneca is perhaps the only writer of Graeco-Roman antiquity who condemned warfare as such. Many deplored civil war but applauded conquest of the barbarian.²¹⁴ Seneca points out that the murder of one person is punished while the slaughter of an entire people is praised and rewarded.²¹⁵ He criticises individual conquerors, such as Alexander the Great, who were more usually admired, likening them to natural catastrophes.²¹⁶ He does not spare Rome's own great

²⁰⁸ *placet honores fascisque non scilicet purpura aut uirgis abductum capessere, sed ut amicis propinquisque et omnibus ciuibus, omnibus deinde mortalibus paratior utiliorque sim* (Seneca, *De tranq.* I. 10).

²⁰⁹ *posterorum negotium ago* (Seneca, *Ep.* VIII. 2).

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ See p. 95 above.

²¹² *ibid.*

²¹³ Seneca, *Ep.* CIV. 2ff.

²¹⁴ See for example Tacitus, *Annals* II. 64. The clear implication is that a negotiated settlement was inferior to a military victory.

²¹⁵ *De clem.* I. xxvi. 5; *homicidia compescimus et singulas caedes; quid bella et occisarum gentium gloriosum scelus?... ex senatus consultis plebisque scitis saeua exercentur et publice iubentur uetata priuatim* (Seneca, *Ep.* XCV. 30).

²¹⁶ Seneca, *N.Q.* II praef. 5, 6, *De ben.* VII. ii. 5, iii. 1; *Ep.* XCIV. 62-64.

military commanders.²¹⁷ Unlike Cicero,²¹⁸ or St. Augustine,²¹⁹ Seneca did not agree with the concept of a 'just war.'

Seneca was not the first to condemn the bloodshed of the arena. Cicero had done so.

*Sed quae potest homini esse politico delectatio, cum aut homo imbecillus a ualentissima bestia laniatur, aut praeclara bestia uenabulo transuerberatur?*²²⁰

This sentence indicates sympathy on Cicero's part to both man and beast. The general thrust of his comments, however, gives rise to the suspicion that his real objection was to the scale and the extravagance of the spectacles and that he believed that his correspondent would share these sentiments.²²¹ He does note that there are some who disapprove of the cruelty of the arena.²²² It appears that Cicero himself deplored the contests of his own time but looked back approvingly to past practices that he believed taught about pain and death.²²³

Julius Caesar had made himself unpopular by failing to demonstrate the expected interest and enthusiasm at such contests.²²⁴ In his case there seems to have been no moral or philosophical objection. He was so busy that he begrudged the time.

Seneca's criticism of the gladiatorial games so beloved of the majority of his fellow citizens is two-fold. On the one hand he is concerned at the effects of such brutal spectacles on the morality of the spectator.²²⁵ In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca relates how he attended a mid-day matinee, expecting some light entertainment. Instead he found himself witnessing the slaughter of defenceless men.²²⁶ It is true that they were violent criminals who arguably deserved their fate.²²⁷ But what crime had the spectators committed, wonders Seneca, that they were

²¹⁷ *Ne Gnaeo quidem Pompeio externa bella ac domestica uirtus aut ratio persuadebat, sed insanus amor magnitudinis falsae* (Seneca, *Ep.* XCIV. 64-66).

²¹⁸ Cicero, *De officiis* I. 36.

²¹⁹ St. Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* I. xxi.

²²⁰ Cicero, *Ad fam.* VII. i. 3.

²²¹ Cicero, *Ad fam.* VII. i. 2.

²²² Cicero, *Tusc. disp.* II. 41.

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ ... *nihil praeterea agebat, ... uitandi rumoris causa, quo patrem Caesarem uulgo reprehensum commemorabat, quod inter spectandum epistulis libellisque legendis aut rescribendis uacaret...* (Suetonius, *Augustus* XLIV).

²²⁵ *Nihil uero tam damnosum bonis moribus quam in aliquo spectaculo desiderare. Tunc enim per uoluptatem facilius uitia subrepunt ... Auarior redeo, ambitiosior, luxuriosior, immo uero crudelior et inhumanior* (Seneca, *Ep.* VII. 2-3).

²²⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* VII. 3.

²²⁷ *Quia occidit ille, meruit ut hoc pateretur* (Seneca, *Ep.* VII. 5).

condemned to watch?²²⁸ In Seneca's opinion those who viewed the slaughter were being punished no less severely than those who were being butchered. He repeats the same sentiment in another letter.

*Homo, sacra res homini, iam per lusum ac iocum occiditur et quem erudiri ad inferenda accipiendaque uulnera nefas erat, is iam nudus inermisque producitur satisque spectaculi ex homine mors est.*²²⁹

The emphasis is on the deleterious effect the exhibition has on the spectator rather than sympathy for the victims.²³⁰ Yet there is something in both letters that, taken as a whole, indicates a certain level of sympathy with the unfortunate 'performers.'²³¹ Nevertheless it does seem that Seneca's chief concern is with the moral suffering of the spectator (especially himself) than with the physical agonies of the condemned in the arena. This train of thought is also present in his ideas on slaves, discussed below.²³² It is true that in Seneca's belief system moral damage is more serious than injury to the body. The spectators chose to be present to witness the cruelty of the arena and so endanger their moral health. The 'entertainers' had no choice. Their bodies were in danger but their souls were not.

Christian authors were also troubled as much, if not more, by the moral assault on the spectator as by the physical assault on the participants. Tertullian labelled the games "murder." *Ita mortem homicidiis consolabantur.*²³³ In a similar fashion to Seneca, he argues that the innocent cannot take pleasure in witnessing the punishment of another. *Et tamen innocentes de supplicio alterius laetari non oportet...*²³⁴ and even echoes Seneca's thought that the spectator is being punished by

²²⁸ *tu quid meruisisti miser, ut hoc spectes?* (Seneca, *Ep.* VII. 5).

²²⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* XCV. 33.

²³⁰ *Auarior redeo, ambitiosior, luxuriosior immo uero crudelior et inhumanior, quia inter homines fui* (Seneca, *Ep.* VII. 3).

²³¹ *Nunc omissis nugis mera homicidia sunt* (Seneca, *Ep.* VII. 3).

²³² The thought has an echo in 19th century England. Thomas Henry Huxley was critical of the slavery he saw in practice in Brazil (Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: The Devil's Disciple*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994, p. 59). His criticism, too, had more to do with the moral damage to the slave owner rather than sympathy for the slave's situation: "... this brutality degrades the man who practises it" (Huxley quoted in Desmond, *Huxley: The Devil's Disciple*, p. 205).

²³³ Tertullian, *De spectaculis* XII.

²³⁴ Tertullian, *De spectaculis* XIX.

watching the show.²³⁵ St. Augustine, too, worries about the affect on the spectator rather than expressing sympathy for those involved in the actual combat:

*et non erat iam ille qui uenerat sed unus de turba ad quam uenerat, et uerus eorum socius a quibus adductus erat.*²³⁶

Augustine is concerned about the parlous moral condition of his friend who had been unable to resist the temptation to watch the combat. He has no thought to spare for those who participated in it.

Suetonius reports that Nero held gladiatorial contests in which killing was forbidden.²³⁷ It appears that these games took place at the beginning of the reign. This decision agrees with Nero's comment on signing a death warrant that he wished he had never learned to write.²³⁸ It is tempting to assign these episodes to Seneca's influence, whether direct or indirect. It is just as likely that they were the results of Nero's own well-developed sense of the dramatic. There is ample evidence for this facet of Nero's personality. Most obviously there were his stage performances; there was the literally theatrical attempt to murder Agrippina; the singing of a tragic lay as Rome burned; even his reported last words as those few attendants faithful to the end prepared his grave: "*qualis artifex pereo!*"²³⁹

Seneca provides evidence in support of the story of Nero's reluctance to sign the sentence of death.

*Ut raro, inuitus et cum magna cunctatione, ita aliquando scribas necesse est istud, quod tibi in odium litteras adduxit, sed, sicut facis, cum magna cunctatione, cum multis dilationibus.*²⁴⁰

Here, it would seem, speaks the pragmatic politician rather than the ethical philosopher. Yet Seneca's version of Stoicism justified such a stance. Pity and mercy must be clearly

²³⁵ ... *cum magis competat innocenti dolere, quod homo, par eius, tam nocens factus est, ut tam crudeliter impendatur* (Tertullian, *De spectaculis* XIX).

²³⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions* VI. 8. 13.

²³⁷ Suetonius, *Nero* XII. The report is included in a section covering such items as Nero's insistence that members of the senatorial and equestrian orders participate in gladiatorial combats. The implication is that bloodless games were considered to be equally outrageous.

²³⁸ Suetonius, *Nero* X.

²³⁹ Suetonius, *Nero* XLIX.

²⁴⁰ Seneca, *De clementia* II.ii. 3.

distinguished. Pity is a defect, *vitium animi*.²⁴¹ The *sapiens* will not suffer from a weakness that must cloud his ability to act appropriately.²⁴² Mercy, by contrast, is refraining from exacting the full punishment that might be expected.²⁴³ Mercy can only be extended before punishment is pronounced. A pardon is given to one who ought to be punished. Since the *sapiens* cannot do anything he should not do, nor neglect to do anything he should do, then he cannot pardon once he has passed sentence.²⁴⁴ The wise man will take into account any and all mitigating factors *before* he imposes the penalty.²⁴⁵ We see this idea in action in the accounts of some Christian martyrdoms,²⁴⁶ although it is uncertain whether the magistrates involved were influenced by Stoicism in general or Seneca in particular, or merely following established precedent. The younger Pliny as Trajan's legate in Bithynia consults his Emperor on whether he should take into account the age of the accused Christians brought before him.²⁴⁷ The Christian authors of the various martyr *Acta* intend to emphasise the strength of the martyrs' faith in the face of torture and death. What comes through just as strongly is the reluctance of the magistrate to inflict the punishment decreed.

3. 6 On Slavery

None of Seneca's extant works contains any hint that he condemned the institution of slavery. It seems that no other Stoic, not even the ex-slave, Epictetus, proposed the abolition of slavery. This may seem remarkable given that earlier Stoic thinkers had declared that lordship is as much an evil as servitude.²⁴⁸ It is not so remarkable when it is remembered that the British empire, ruled by Christians, did not abolish the institution of slavery until 1833.²⁴⁹

²⁴¹ Seneca, *De clementia* II. iv. 1.

²⁴² *De clementia* II. vi. 1; *maeror* (the result of pity) *contundit mentes, abicit, contrahit* (Seneca, *De clementia* II. v. 5).

²⁴³ Seneca, *De clementia*, II. iii.

²⁴⁴ Seneca, *De clementia*, II. vii. 1-2.

²⁴⁵ Seneca, *De clementia*, II. vii. 2-5. There is no mention of what, if anything, is to be done in the event of the discovery of new evidence.

²⁴⁶ See Appendix A.

²⁴⁷ Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 2.

²⁴⁸ D.L. VII. 122.

²⁴⁹ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, p. 189.

Seneca praised Diogenes for refusing to have his runaway slave recaptured.²⁵⁰ The praise was not for the humane decision to allow the man his freedom. It was because Diogenes was able to rid himself of yet another possession. Slaves are even more of a burden than other property.²⁵¹ They must be fed, housed and clothed.²⁵² Worse, they must be watched because they are thieves.²⁵³ This is a strange position for a Stoic to adopt; to worry about one possession stealing another possession. Although Seneca did not advocate, and probably could not have imagined, the abolition of slavery he did propose a decrease in the numbers of slaves. As with gladiatorial contests and public executions this had as much to do with the owners' comfort as the slaves' suffering. There is no pleasure in accepting the service of the unwilling. An owner also had to bear the misery his slaves demonstrated at their plight.

These sentiments are at variance with others expressed in several of the letters to Lucilius. There is essentially no difference between slave and owner in the only matter that really counts, that is, *uirtus*.²⁵⁴ A slave is equally a human being and must be accorded all the rights due to that status.²⁵⁵ There is no such thing as a 'born slave.'²⁵⁶ Seneca points out that the vicissitudes of fortune may at any time plunge anyone from the highest position to the lowest.²⁵⁷

These discrepancies can perhaps be explained by taking into account the different places in which they occur. The dialogue *De tranquillitate animi* is addressed nominally to Serenus but undoubtedly aimed also at a wider audience. This audience was probably considered to be sympathetic to Stoic ideas, but no more than sympathetic. Its members could not be expected to accept the ideal that the correct action must proceed from the correct motive. An appeal to enlightened self-interest was more likely to be persuasive.²⁵⁸ This point is demonstrated in the

²⁵⁰ Seneca, *De tranq.* VIII. 7.

²⁵¹ The comment of Diogenes himself on this episode is interesting: “gelōin eij Mavnh~ me;n cwri;~ Diogevnou~ zŋ], Diogevnh~ de; cwri;~ Mavnou ouj dunhvsetai” (D.L. VI. 55).

²⁵² Seneca, *De tranq.* VIII. 8.

²⁵³ *ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ep.* XXXI. 11; *sed per illud, quo boni sunt, pares sunt...* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXVI. 34).

²⁵⁵ *Immo homines... immo conserui...* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLVII. 1).

²⁵⁶ *Vis tu cogitare istum, quem seruum tuum uocas, ex isdem seminibus ortum eodem frui caelo, aequae spirare, aequae uiuere, aequae mori* (Seneca, *Ep.* XLVII. 10).

²⁵⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* XLVII. 9, 10, 12.

²⁵⁸ Marcus Crassus, for example, pointed out that it is common sense to take care of one's tools

case of the murder of L. Pedanius Secundus.²⁵⁹ Even before C. Cassius Longinus stood to extol the benefits of *mos maiorum* a majority of senators was in favour of the penalty it imposed. There would have been little point in expounding to these panicked slave owners the philosophical reasons for treating their property well.²⁶⁰ They might have been reached by an appeal to enlightened self-interest. Seneca relates several stories in *De beneficiis* of owners being saved by slaves whom they had treated well.²⁶¹

The letters, on the other hand, are addressed to Lucilius, like Seneca himself a traveller on the road to wisdom. They also were undoubtedly intended for wider circulation. Their intended audience, however, was different from that of *De tranquillitate animi*. It was envisaged as consisting of those, like Lucilius himself, with a serious interest in the tenets of Stoicism. Seneca was to be their teacher. The letters are the final statement of Seneca's moral philosophy. They are amongst the last works that he wrote after his retreat from public life. His final work written, or perhaps revised, as he was dying either no longer exists or has not yet been identified.

Seneca's concern is not with the institution itself but with the individuals on both sides of the owner/property divide and how they were to relate to each other. He was as much, if not more, concerned with the moral position of the slave owner as he was with the plight of the slave. There is a faint echo here of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. Seeing the slave of an acquaintance bearing the marks of a beating, he remarked, ὄρω σου τοῦ θυμοῦ τὰ ἔχρη.²⁶² Seneca's works are full of praise for those who, like Lucilius, treat their slaves as individuals rather than as property or as mere tools. Slaves are fellow human beings and must be regarded as such and treated accordingly. They are entitled to all the rights generally accorded human beings, except one. The one exception is the right to freedom. That was the gift of the slave owner to be bestowed or withheld at his or her discretion. Otherwise the same *humanitas et clementia* should govern relationships with slaves as it should with anyone else.²⁶³ Slaves, moreover, can be

(Plutarch, *Crassus* 2).

²⁵⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 42.

²⁶⁰ Seneca's apparent inaction in this matter is discussed below.

²⁶¹ Seneca, *De ben.* III. xxiii. 2- xxvii. 4.

²⁶² D.L. VII. 23.

²⁶³ Seneca, *Epp.* XLVII. 13; LXXVII. 8; LXXXVIII. 30; *De clementia* I. xviii. 1; *N Q.* IV *praef.* 18, *De uita beata* XXIV. 3.

treated as social equals.²⁶⁴ If we can believe that *Ep. LXXXIII* is autobiographical then it seems that Seneca, at least in this instance, did practise what he preached.²⁶⁵ Seneca describes his exercise regimen. His running companion is a young slave, who points out that he and his master are at the same stage of life. Both are losing their teeth.²⁶⁶ Seneca jokes to his friend that he really needs a younger pace setter. The boy is too fast for him. The truth or otherwise of this anecdote is not as important as the fact that Seneca could write of the easy relationship between himself and the slave boy and expect to be believed. This attitude is in contrast to that advocated by Cicero (perhaps following Panaetius): *operam exigendam, iusta praebenda*.²⁶⁷ Seneca could also demonstrate the prejudices of his time, place and status. He criticises those who lose their temper with *extremum mancipium* on the grounds that one might as well be angry with *catenarius canis*.²⁶⁸ He regards the slave door keeper as the lowest of the low, no better than a dog chained to the entrance, and invites his readers to treat him in similar fashion.²⁶⁹ He can describe the scandal of Roman senators being tortured as the sort of treatment to which *nequam mancipia* were more usually exposed.²⁷⁰

There is moreover one outstanding incident concerning slaves where Seneca is distinguished by his silence. This is the slaughter of the entire slave household of Lucius Pedanius Secundus following his murder by one of their number.²⁷¹ The general populace rioted to demonstrate its displeasure at the proposed enforcement of the harsh ancestral law. The minority feeling in the Senate itself was for mercy.²⁷² The majority voted for the *mos maiorum*. The rioters prevented the sentences from being carried out until Nero called out the troops. The emperor's previously expressed compassion for the condemned was not in evidence on this occasion,²⁷³ although it

²⁶⁴ Seneca, *Ep. XLVII*. 13.

²⁶⁵ The difficulties involved in teasing biographical details from Seneca's works has already been alluded to (see p. 85 above).

²⁶⁶ Presumably the child was about seven or eight years old, the age when the shedding of infant dentition is obvious. If the boy had been much older the point of the joke would be lost.

²⁶⁷ Cicero, *De officiis* I. 41.

²⁶⁸ Seneca, *De ira* III. xxxvii. 2.

²⁶⁹ Similarly in *Ep. XV*. 3, where Seneca abuses 'personal trainers' as *pessimae notae mancipia*.

²⁷⁰ Seneca, *De ira* III. xix. 2.

²⁷¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 43f.

²⁷² *ibid.*

²⁷³ Seneca, *De clementia* II. i. 2; "*uellem litteras nescirem!*" (Suetonius, *Nero* X). But despite his sighs he did sign the death warrant.

should be noted that Nero vetoed a proposal that Secundus' *liberti* still living in the house should also be punished.²⁷⁴ Seneca is not mentioned at all.²⁷⁵ There are several possible reasons that Seneca failed to join the debate or, if he did, for Tacitus' failure to record his sentiments.²⁷⁶ Perhaps Seneca preferred to work behind the scenes and persuade Nero to oppose the death sentences. This certainly would fit in with what appears to have been Seneca's preferred methods. Either he relished the role of *éminence grise*, or his senatorial support was not enough to encourage him to attempt to achieve his aims through that body.²⁷⁷ It is also possible that, despite his expressed beliefs, he was as panic stricken as the majority of senators and voted for the *mos maiorum*. Rudich claims that Seneca still had sufficient influence on the *princeps* for such a move to have had some chance of success. Seneca's authority, however, had waned after the death of Agrippina.²⁷⁸ It is unlikely that any intervention on his part would have been successful. Moreover Nero might well have believed that it was not worth offending the majority of senators to save the lives of a few hundred slaves. It is even possible that Seneca himself shared that pragmatic view.²⁷⁹ If this appears to be yet another example of Senecan hypocrisy perhaps a comparison with Thomas Jefferson is helpful.²⁸⁰

The man who wrote: "... all men are created equal; ... they are endowed by their Creator with CERTAIN [*inherent and*] inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness..."²⁸¹ exercised property rights over other human beings. Despite his own written views on the evils of slavery and his hopes to end it (at some unspecified time in the indefinite future),²⁸² Jefferson owned and traded slaves all his life.²⁸³ After his death most of these people

²⁷⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 44.

²⁷⁵ See Seneca, *N. Q.* I. 16 for Augustus' mercy under similar circumstances.

²⁷⁶ See Vasily Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero. The Price of Dissimulation*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 53-54 for possible reasons for Seneca's silence.

²⁷⁷ Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics*, p. 96.

²⁷⁸ Chapter 2. 3.

²⁷⁹ Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero*, p. 53.

²⁸⁰ See Appendix III.

²⁸¹ *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Adrienne Koch and William Peden (edd), New York: Random House, 1944, p. 22.

²⁸² Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, p. 255.

²⁸³ Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson. An Intimate History*, New York: Norton, 1974, p. 123.

were valued in the same manner as the rest of his estate.²⁸⁴ Five were emancipated under the provisions of his will.²⁸⁵ In the teeth of his own well-known opposition to miscegenation²⁸⁶ and his stated belief in the inherent inferiority of black people,²⁸⁷ Jefferson fathered at least one slave child.²⁸⁸ Jefferson himself summed up the situation as he saw it: “Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.”²⁸⁹ Perhaps Seneca viewed the practice of slavery and its accompanying cruelties in his own culture in much the same light. It was not only the threat (real or imagined) to the security of slave-owners posed by possibly vengeful slaves that was a matter of such concern that slaves had to be controlled by the reality of draconian punishment if an owner was murdered by an enslaved member of the household. The comfortable and, if desired, luxurious lifestyle provided by the labour of human chattels was too enjoyable to be abandoned.²⁹⁰

3. 7 Conclusion

Seneca’s last words, dictated in his final hours, have not survived or perhaps have not yet been identified. It is therefore not known if at the end he clarified his position on the fate of the soul. His descriptions of one of the two possibilities he favoured would have been attractive to Christians, a qualified immortality in a purer light than is possible in earthly life.²⁹¹ His teaching on the duties owed by one human being to another, teachings that also informed his views on slavery and his opposition to the bloodshed of the arena, would resonate with Christians of any era.

There is no one factor that that can be identified that attracted Christian attention to Seneca. There is, rather, a cumulative effect that includes the chronology of his life, the timing of his

²⁸⁴ John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears. Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, London and New York: Macmillan, 1977, p.168.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 432.

²⁸⁷ Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, pp.187-288, pp. 256-259.

²⁸⁸ See Appendix III.

²⁸⁹ *Letters of Thomas Jefferson* (to John Holmes, April 22, 1820), in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, p. 698.

²⁹⁰ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 1, p. 102 (Jefferson's wedding gift to his daughter of land - and slaves), p. 103.

²⁹¹ Seneca, *Ad Polybium IX*. 8, for example.

death and aspects of his philosophy. Passages such as *dies iste aeterni natalis est*²⁹² are especially powerful. Their impact is more dramatic if read in epitome, shorn of the surrounding context. Christians concerned about obviously non-Christian features of his philosophy, the use of the plural *dei* instead of the singular, for example, could have convinced themselves that such material belonged to the period before Seneca met St. Paul.

Ruben's painting of Seneca's death scene reflects the perception of Lipsius' seventeenth-century circle of neo-Stoic Christians.²⁹³ Seneca is portrayed as a Christianised martyr.²⁹⁴ This cannot be used as solid evidence to demonstrate how Seneca might have been perceived by Christians more than a thousand years earlier. It does, however, appear that Lipsius came to this conclusion by reading and appreciating Seneca's work. It does not seem impossible that earlier Christians could have reached a similar conclusion by the same method.

The Christian 'adoption' of Seneca is due to an accumulation of factors: the historical coincidence that made him a close contemporary of St. Paul, his death at the hands of Nero, again by an historical coincidence, shortly after the first imperial persecution of Christians, the many aspects of his philosophy, and especially his ethical beliefs, that harmonised with Christian belief. The author of the fictitious correspondence was acquainted with Seneca's career and thought. Just how deep was his knowledge it is difficult to judge. Some of his information could have been gleaned from other Christian writers.

Chapters Two and Three are speculative, identifying factors of Seneca's personality, career path and/or philosophy that could have attracted Christian approval. The following chapter discusses what various Christian authors actually did write about Seneca.

²⁹² Seneca, *Ep.* CII. 26.

²⁹³ Mark Morford, *Stoics and neo-Stoics. Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

²⁹⁴ See Frontispiece.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seneca in the Opinion of Early Latin Christian Authors

Seneca saepe noster.¹

Towards the end of the fourth century the creator of the fictitious correspondence between ‘Seneca’ and ‘St. Paul’ became convinced that Seneca had been at least sympathetic to Christian beliefs and perhaps a secret convert.² He wrote his letters partly in an attempt to supply evidence for Seneca’s interest in Christianity. He invented the friendship with St. Paul to provide the means by which Seneca could have been introduced to Christianity, all that was necessary, in Lactantius’ opinion, for Seneca to become a Christian.

This chapter offers a survey of what is known about Christian awareness of Seneca and his beliefs, especially his moral and ethical philosophy, in the first four centuries. It discusses also the authors’ opinions of Seneca and his views. There is no suggestion that these Christian authors writing in Latin earlier than the end of the fourth century, when the fictitious correspondence appeared, saw him as a sympathiser, let alone a convert. The creator of the correspondence, however, did see him in this light. It is unlikely that he came to this conclusion based only on his own reading of Seneca’s works. He knew something of earlier Christian opinion of Seneca. The popularity of his work indicates that there was a large and receptive audience that was willing to be won over to his viewpoint.³

Seneca was not the only pagan philosopher to be viewed sympathetically by Roman Christians. Between A.D. 180 and 200, when Greek was still the predominant language of Christianity, even in the imperial capital,⁴ a Christian philosophy was constructed in Rome that was, at least in part, influenced by Galen, pagan philosopher and court physician.⁵ The adherents of this philosophy

¹ Tertullian, *De anima* XX. 1.

² Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. I, III, V, XIV; See also the commentaries on *Epp.* I, II, V, XIV (Chapter 1. 12 above).

³ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

⁴ See p. 190 below.

⁵ R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 79.

were excommunicated by the bishop of Rome,⁶ and they have left no legacy beyond the mere report of their existence.

Reynolds suggests that Seneca was not regarded as a Christian before the fourteenth century, although he acknowledges that Seneca's writings were, on the whole, favourably received by many early Christians.⁷ Reynolds is here disputing the view that Seneca's supposed conversion led to the preservation and transmission of his works. The evidence, however, strongly suggests that before the end of the fourth century, at least one Latin-speaking Christian did come to believe that Seneca was so attracted by Christian teaching that he was willing to act as missionary to the court of Nero. That Christian was the anonymous author of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul. There were other contemporaries who were willing to accept this view, if we can believe Jerome's notice that the letters were read *a plurimis*. St. Jerome included Seneca in his list of writers on sacred topics solely on the basis of this correspondence.⁸ St. Augustine is in general agreement in his apparent acceptance of Seneca as a possible Christian sympathiser. Reporting Seneca's opinion of the Jews, Augustine notes that he does not mention Christianity.⁹ The reason, according to Augustine, is that he preferred not to defy the ancestral customs of Rome by expressing admiration for this new way of life, but neither did he wish to criticise a religion to which he himself was attracted.¹⁰

Read selectively much of Seneca's thought, especially as expounded to Lucilius in the *Epistulae Morales*, can be interpreted as having been inspired by Christianity. *Ep. CX* provides one of many possible examples. Seneca refers to *deus et parens noster*.¹¹ Earlier in the same letter he claims that the time is near at hand when the prosperous man is upset and the unfortunate set free.¹² Seneca meant that the universal experience of death would rob the wealthy of their

⁶ Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians*, p. 76.

⁷ L. D. Reynolds, *The Medieval Tradition of Seneca's Letters*, Oxford Classical and Philosophical Monographs, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 82f.

⁸ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

⁹ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* VI. xi.

¹⁰ *Christianos tamen... in neutram partem commemorare ausus est, ne uel laudaret contra suae patriae ueterem consuetudinem, uel reprehenderet contra propriam forsitan uoluntatem* (St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* VI. xi).

¹¹ Seneca, *Ep. CX*. 10.

¹² *Prope est rerum omnium terminus, prope est, inquam, et illud, unde felix eicitur, et illud, unde infelix emittitur* (Seneca, *Ep. CX*. 4).

luxuries and free the poor from their travail. His words, especially if taken out of context, could also be interpreted as meaning that the end of time would bring joy to the poor and the suffering and disaster to the rich. Even if Christians interpreted *rerum omnium terminus* as the death of the individual, as Seneca intended, the phrase still carries a suggestion that the poor are more likely to enjoy a blissful after-life than are the wealthy.¹³

There are other instances in Seneca's works: *nihil opinionis causa, omnia conscientiae faciam*, for example.¹⁴ This lofty sentiment could come from any number of Christian writers, or indeed many non-Christian moralists. In the following chapter of the same work Seneca states,

*Ero amicis iucundus, inimicis mitis et facilis. Exorabor, antequam roger, et honestis precibus occurram. Patriam meam esse mundum sciam et praesides deos, hos supra me circaque me stare factorum dictorumque censores.*¹⁵

This passage, like many others, demonstrates how a Latin-speaking Christian could come to believe that Seneca had stumbled on a Christian truth, possibly by accident, as had other pagan philosophers. Seneca, however, was different from other philosophers. For one thing, and unusually, he wrote in Latin, thus making his thought directly accessible to those who were literate in Latin, but not Greek. For another, he was a contemporary of St. Paul so that it was at least chronologically possible that the two men could have met.

In the fictitious correspondence between 'Seneca' and 'Paul,' the author hints that Seneca was a 'natural Christian.'¹⁶ This natural bent, however, has been developed by the relationship with 'Paul.' In the final letter of the collection as it now exists, 'Paul' claims that

*Certus igitur ego in agro iam fertili semen fortissimum sero, non quidem materiam quae corrumpi uidetur, sed uerbum stabile Dei.*¹⁷

He goes on to advise 'Seneca' *nouum te auctorem feceris Christi Iesu.*¹⁸ In the eyes of our anonymous author Seneca, under Paul's guidance, had almost achieved *inreprehensibilis sophia*.

¹³ Matthew 19. 25; Mark 10. 23; Luke 18. 24-25.

¹⁴ Seneca, *De uita beata* XX. 4.

¹⁵ Seneca, *De uita beata* XX. 5.

¹⁶ See p. 81 above.

¹⁷ Barlow (ed), *Epistolae*, Ep. XIV.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

A reader must be selective in what is chosen to illustrate the supposed Christian inspiration behind Seneca's thought. Some of his statements are, not surprisingly, anything but Christian. The sentence quoted on the previous page, for example uses the plural *deos* where a Christian would prefer *deum*. This might not have been the problem to Christians of the first few hundred years that one might imagine. For centuries Christians were surrounded by representations of pagan deities. These images were no more than the public furniture of daily life for all, whatever their religious orientation. Some Christians were even interred under the pagan epitaph *D.M.* It is possible that the epitaph was not recognised as unsuitable. *D.M.* was traditionally carved on tombstones. Perhaps no thought was given to its meaning or its connotations.

Not all Christians, of course, were oblivious of the implications of the paganism of their environment. Lausberg has noted an example of a Christian author, Minucius Felix, paraphrasing Seneca and in the process altering Seneca's plural *dii* to the singular.¹⁹ St. Augustine has preserved what seem to be Seneca's original words: *dii autem nullo debent coli genere, si hoc uolunt.*²⁰ Minucius altered the words, while preserving the central idea: *quo modo deum uiolat qui hoc modo placat.*²¹

In one of his letters to Lucilius Seneca claims that *hoc enim est, quod mihi philosophia promittit, ut parem deo faciat.*²² No Christian would claim equality with God. St. Augustine did state that the human mind can be united with that of God and that a human could, and indeed should, imitate God.²³ It is, however, the *sapiens*, and only the *sapiens*, who is capable of these feats. The best that most humans can accomplish is to imitate the *sapiens*.²⁴ Augustine does not state plainly, as Seneca does, that the *sapiens* is as rare as the phoenix, but the implication is clear. In Augustine's eyes Jesus Christ was the only true *sapiens* and so the model to emulate as far as

¹⁹ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, pp. 217-218.

²⁰ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* VI. x.

²¹ Minucius Felix XXII. 9.

²² Seneca, *Ep.* XLVIII. 11.

²³ *Cum enim sapiens sit Deo ita mente coniunctus, ut nihil interponatur, quod separet... sapiens enim, quantum datum est, imitatur Deum* (St. Augustine *De utilitate credendi* XV. 33).

²⁴ St. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi* XV. 33.

humanly possible.²⁵ Those in doubt as to the correct course of action in any situation need only obey the commands of the *Ecclesia catholica* whose authority God had confirmed.²⁶

Chapter XV of Augustine's *De utilitate credendi* is based on the Stoicism favoured by Seneca and suitably Christianised. First, and most obviously, the Christian deity has been added. More importantly Augustine twists Stoic argumentation to reach a different conclusion from that reached by the pagan philosopher. The aim is not, as in Seneca, that the *stultus* should seek to become a *sapiens*, but rather that *stulti* (and that includes all of humanity) must obey the Church. Seneca believed that an adult should be autonomous, obeying no master, while behaving as if some man of high character were watching him and ordering all actions as if he beheld them.²⁷

4. 1 *Seneca noster*

The quote from Tertullian at the head of this chapter can be misinterpreted. It may give a false impression of his opinion of Seneca. It is therefore necessary to discuss what Tertullian might have meant by referring to Seneca as “often ours.”

Waszink suggests that Tertullian's use of *noster* indicates his belief that Seneca was a Christian.²⁸ In his commentary on *De anima* XX. 1, *sicut ut Seneca saepe noster*, he suggests that “*Seneca saepe noster* = Christianus”.²⁹ As evidence for this claim he compares this passage with others in which Tertullian clearly intends *noster* to mean *Christianus*. At *De anima* II.1, *iuxta nostra sensisse*, *nostra* refers to *Christiana*; at *De anima* II. 5, *regulae nostrae* are clearly Christian rules; at *De anima* IV *ad fidem nostram* is the faith of Christians. The *deo Israelis et nostro* at *De anima* XXIII. 3 is the God of Israel and of Christians. At *De anima* XXVI.1, *in*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ “*Aliquis uir bonus...*” (Seneca, *Ep.* XI. 8). Seneca uses the word *uir*. It is doubtful if he could have conceived of a “woman of high character” in the same sense. Although he acknowledged women's ability to study philosophy (see below) the *sapiens* is always *uir*.

²⁸ J. H. Waszink (ed.), *Tertulliani de anima*, edited with introduction and commentary by J. H. Waszink, Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1947, p. 282.

²⁹ *ibid.*

nostras iam lineas gradum colligam, and *quia quantum ad nostros, nostros* clearly equals *Christianos*. Likewise the *nostri* of *De anima* LVI. 5 also stands for *Christiani*.³⁰

Reynolds points out the critical importance of *saepe*, a qualification too often overlooked.³¹ In none of the other passages cited by Waszink, in which Tertullian uses *noster* to indicate *Christianus*, does *saepe* also appear. As Tertullian himself acknowledges, some philosophers have stumbled accidentally on the (Christian) truth, evidence, he believes, in its favour.³²

Tertullian claims only that Seneca's beliefs were often compatible with those of Christianity. The actions of a non-Christian can be described in English as 'Christian', meaning that in the opinion of the (Christian) speaker the non-Christian behaves in a manner worthy of a Christian. This is close to Tertullian's meaning, although he is referring to Seneca's ethical beliefs, as reflected in his writings, rather than to his actions. Lactantius made the same point more clearly when he declared that Seneca would have been a Christian if only he had received proper instruction.³³

St. Jerome also refers to *Seneca noster*. Trillitzsch suggests that he, too, is ascribing to Seneca a close similarity to Christian belief.³⁴ The context, however, indicates otherwise. The reference to Seneca is both preceded and followed by the opinions of various pagans on the subject of matrimony. The passage *scripserunt Aristoteles et Plutarchus et noster Seneca de matrimonio libros* is designed to do no more than define Seneca as a Roman in contrast to the two Greek philosophers named.³⁵ In the chapter immediately preceding that under discussion, Jerome refers to *noster comicus*.³⁶ There can be no doubt that *noster* means that the *comicus* was a Roman, not that he was a Christian. Jerome's reluctance to include Seneca *in catalogo sanctorum* is additional evidence that he was doing no more than distinguishing the Roman philosopher from the Greek philosophers.³⁷ It was only the correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul that

³⁰ Waszink, *Tertulliani de anima*, p. 75.

³¹ Reynolds, *The Medieval Tradition of Seneca's Letters*, p. 83, note 2.

³² Tertullian, *De anima* II.1; Waszink, *Tertulliani de anima*, p. 98.

³³ Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* VI. xxiv. 14.

³⁴ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 151.

³⁵ St. Jerome, *Contra Iovinianum* I. 49.

³⁶ St. Jerome, *Contra Iovinianum* I. 48.

³⁷ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

persuaded Jerome to include Seneca in his list of saintly men.³⁸ It would seem that Jerome was not convinced of the supposed Christian inspiration in Seneca's philosophy, although he did admit his *continentissima uita*, a virtue Jerome admired.³⁹ Lactantius uses *noster* in a similar sense when he refers to *nostrorum Seneca, Stoicos secutus, et ipse Tullius*.⁴⁰ Like Jerome, Lactantius uses *noster* to distinguish the two Romans in his list from the Greek philosophers who precede them.

Despite Tertullian's stated opposition to philosophy he had no qualms in quoting Seneca,⁴¹ regarding Stoicism, albeit grudgingly, as the one philosophical system that bore any resemblance to his version of Christianity.⁴² His supposed opposition to pagan philosophy is undermined by the sheer number of times he quotes approvingly from philosophical writings, especially Roman.⁴³ He quotes Seneca twice in *De anima*, at XX.1,⁴⁴ and at XLII. 2, the latter quote adapted, in Waszink's opinion, from Seneca's *Troades* 397.⁴⁵

After the introductory *sicut et Seneca saepe noster*, Tertullian provides an accurate rendering of Seneca, except for a trifling difference in word order. *Insita sunt nobis omnium aetatum, omnium artium semina, magisterque ex occulto deus producit ingenia*, writes Seneca,⁴⁶ which Tertullian renders as *insita sunt nobis omnium artium et aetatum semina, magisterque ex occulto deus producit ingenia, ex seminibus scilicet insitis et occultis per infantiam, quae sunt et intellectus*.⁴⁷ After beginning his sentence with the Senecan quote Tertullian expands on the original to make the sentiment agree more closely with Christian doctrine.⁴⁸

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Lactantius, *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 4.

⁴¹ Trillitzsch *Seneca* I, p. 123f.

⁴² Tertullian, *Praescr. Haer.* VII.

⁴³ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 124.

⁴⁴ Seneca, *De beneficiis*. IV. vi. 6.

⁴⁵ Waszink, *Tertulliani de anima*, pp. 46*- 47*. See also below.

⁴⁶ Seneca, *De beneficiis* IV. vi. 6.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *De anima* XX. 1.

⁴⁸ Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. II, *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. XXXIV, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985, p. 20.

Waszink assigns inspiration for Tertullian's *De anima* XLII. 2: *Seneca post mortem ait, omnia finiuntur, etiam ipsa* (sc. *mors*), in part to a lost work by Seneca, *De immatura morte*,⁴⁹ and partly to Seneca's *Troades*.⁵⁰ Lausberg, followed by Newman, disputes this identification, arguing that Seneca produced no work entitled *De immatura morte*, and that the sentence properly belongs in his *De remediis fortuitorum*.⁵¹ Newman places the quotation in the Preface of *De remediis*.⁵² The same Senecan citation appears twice in Tertullian's *De resurrectione carnis*.⁵³ On the second occasion Tertullian obviously felt no need to repeat the attribution he had supplied shortly before. *De anima* 50 and 56 also appear to have been influenced by Seneca's *De remediis fortuitorum*.⁵⁴

In *De anima* Tertullian uses the Senecan quotation to combat the well known, and apparently widely approved,⁵⁵ teaching of Epicurus,⁵⁶ that death is not relevant to human beings.⁵⁷ Tertullian states that Seneca's argument that *post mortem... omnia finiuntur, etiam ipsa* is correct in its claim that death applies to all living things, including humans, but that it too is some way short of the Christian truth. Tertullian discusses this belief again in *De resurrectione carnis*. In the first chapter of this work both Seneca and Epicurus are criticised by name for their common thesis that there is nothing after death. The judgement of Empedocles, of Pythagoras and of the Platonists, that the soul is immortal, is more admirable. Those who admit the continued corporal survival of the soul, although they are mistaken as to its form, are closer to the truth than are those who believe that death ends everything.⁵⁸ In *De resurrectione* III. 3 Tertullian again refers to this passage from Seneca. This time the author is not named and the quote is included amongst other popular expressions of opinion that death is the end. Seneca has nothing to offer Tertullian

⁴⁹ fragment 28 Haase.

⁵⁰ Waszink, *Tertulliani de anima*, pp. 46*-47*.

⁵¹ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 165; Newman, 'Senecae *De remediis*,' p. 231 f. See also Trillitzsch, *Seneca I*, p. 126.

⁵² Newman, 'Senecae *De remediis*,' p. 119.

⁵³ *Ait et Seneca omnia post mortem finiri, etiam ipsam* (Tertullian, *De resurr.* I. 4); *at cum aiunt mortuum quod mortuum et uiua dum uiuis et post mortem omnia finiuntur, etiam ipsa...* (Tertullian, *De resurr.* III. 3).

⁵⁴ Waszink, *Tertulliani de anima*, pp. 46*-47*, 519, 568.

⁵⁵ *plane cum uulgo interdum et sapientes sententiam suam iungunt* (Tertullian, *De resurr.* I. 4).

⁵⁶ *uulgare satis opinione* (Tertullian, *De anima* XLII. 41).

⁵⁷ Tertullian, *De anima* XLII. 1.

⁵⁸ *... tolerabilius mutata quam negata qualitate...* (Tertullian, *De resurr.* I. 6).

on the question of the immortality of the soul. In this instance the Roman philosopher is far from being *noster*.

Seneca is not the only Roman author to have influenced Tertullian. The elder Pliny is the Roman writer most frequently quoted in *De anima*. Pliny was himself a follower of the Stoa and his *Naturalis historia* is perfused with a Stoic view of the world. Lucretius and Varro were also consulted, but Cicero appears seldom, if at all,⁵⁹ although he is quoted in other works.⁶⁰ Tertullian more often refers to Greek writers, including philosophers, than to Roman.⁶¹ He is also familiar with Greek patristic writings and is almost the only early Christian author equally proficient in both Greek and Latin.⁶² He thus introduces Stoic influences, already present in the earlier Greek Christian writers, into Latin Christianity.⁶³ Such influences already absorbed into Christianity could not fail to affect Tertullian and, through him, Latin Christianity. When encountered in Seneca, or in the case of adult converts, perhaps remembered from Seneca, they would have a familiar Christian ring.

Like Minucius Felix, and, much later, St. Augustine, Tertullian refers to Seneca's criticism of pagan religious beliefs, 'superstitions' in the eyes of these Christian writers. He claims that Seneca was vilified for attacking these superstitions.⁶⁴ Yet later in the same work Tertullian contrasts the treatment accorded philosophers with that meted out to Christians.⁶⁵ Philosophers are not forced under pain of death to worship false gods, as Christians are.⁶⁶ On the contrary, they are applauded for attacking them.⁶⁷ Tertullian conveniently, and no doubt deliberately, neglects to mention the fact that philosophers were prepared to take part in community religious

⁵⁹ Waszink, *Tertulliani de Anima*, p. 46*.

⁶⁰ Harald Hagendahl, *Von Tertullian zu Cassiodor. Die profane literarische Tradition in dem lateinischen christlichen Schrifttum*, *Studia Graeca et Latina*, Gothoburgensia XLIV, Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1983, p. 18.

⁶¹ Hagendahl, *Von Tertullian zu Cassiodor*, p. 18.

⁶² Hagendahl, *Von Tertullian zu Cassiodor*, p. 17.

⁶³ Colish, *The Stoic Tradition I*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ *Idem estis qui Senecam aliquem pluribus et amarioribus de uestra superstitione perorantem reprehendistis* (Tertullian, *Apologeticus* XII. 6).

⁶⁵ Tertullian, *Apologeticus* XLVI. 3-5.

⁶⁶ *Quis enim philosophum sacrificare aut deierare aut lucernas meridie uanas proferre conpellit?* (Tertullian, *Apologeticus* XLVI. 4).

⁶⁷ *Quinimmo et deos uestros palam destruunt et superstitiones uestras commentariis quoque accusant laudantibus uobis.* (Tertullian, *Apologeticus* XLVI. 4).

observances. It had already been noted that St. Augustine criticised Seneca for hypocrisy on this very point.⁶⁸ Philosophers did not, on the whole and despite any personal reservations, draw attention to themselves by refusing to take part public sacrifice, nor did they attract accusations of lese-majesty by refusing to pay homage to the reigning emperor. Christian criticisms of such pagan religious observances fail to acknowledge their patriotic dimension and thus ignore pagan suspicions that Christians were potentially traitors to the empire.

4. 2 Minucius Felix

Minucius Felix appears to have read all of Seneca's prose works, including some now lost entirely or in part. He refers to one work apparently entitled *De superstitione*, that now exists only as quotations in Christian authors, another called *Exhortationes*, consulted also by Lactantius, and a third named *De remediis fortuitorum*, that survives in an epitomised form.⁶⁹ It is possible that he was also familiar with the tragedies.⁷⁰ Christian scholars were still reading Seneca's tragedies in the fourth and even in the sixth century.⁷¹ Unlike Tertullian, Minucius appears to have had little first hand acquaintance with Greek philosophy, his knowledge acquired at second hand from Cicero and Seneca.⁷² His knowledge of Greek apologetic was gleaned from Tertullian.⁷³

Minucius deploys Seneca's *De superstitione* in a criticism of pagan, specifically, Roman cults.⁷⁴ No censure is more telling than that from within. The opinion of Seneca, Stoic philosopher, Roman senator and *amicus principis*, the most powerful man of his day, would carry more weight amongst Romans, especially well educated, influential or aristocratic Romans, than would any criticism Minucius himself could make. Seneca is never named.⁷⁵ Such failure to attribute was common amongst ancient authors. Sometimes it indicates that the author quoted or referred to was so well known that the audience would recognise an extract from his works or a

⁶⁸ St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* VI. x. See also p. 40 above.

⁶⁹ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 122; Marion Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 62, note 39.

⁷⁰ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 122.

⁷¹ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 167, note 1; Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 151f.

⁷² Hagendahl, *Von Tertullian zu Cassiodor*, p. 27.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 225.

⁷⁵ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 122; Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 200.

reference to his ideas, making citation unnecessary. Minucius Felix assumed that Seneca's thought was sufficiently familiar for his readers to realise that he was referring to the philosopher's works.

Minucius' ambition was to introduce Christianity to his peers and his superiors so that it would become part of the discourse of the educated elite.⁷⁶ His success, or otherwise, is unclear. One has to suspect that his audience was largely Christian and largely not of the elite. The author of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul pictures the goal that Minucius had hoped to achieve: members of the Roman elite, including Seneca and Lucilius, discussing Christian writings.⁷⁷

4. 3 St. Cyprian

Cyprian found much welcome material in Seneca's works for his apology to counter pagan slanders against Christianity.⁷⁸ The advantages of being able to quote an insider's opinion in support of one's own position have been noted above. Another of his works, *De mortalitate*, is heavily indebted to Seneca's thoughts on the subject of combating the fear of death.⁷⁹ Like Minucius the bishop of Carthage does not refer to Seneca by name.⁸⁰ He does not refer to Tertullian by name either despite the fact that, according to Jerome, Cyprian was much influenced by Tertullian.⁸¹

4. 4 Novatian

Early Latin-speaking Christianity was largely a North African phenomenon. Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Cyprian and Lactantius were all from Africa. Novatian, unusually, appears to have had his origins in Rome itself. He was reproached by Cyprian for his harshness towards those who had

⁷⁶ Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 33.

⁷⁷ Barlow (ed), *Epistolae*, Ep. I.

⁷⁸ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 128; Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 62, note 38.

⁷⁹ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 129. Colish believes that the debt to Stoicism has been exaggerated (*The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 33).

⁸⁰ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 128.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

lapsed.⁸² According to Novatian, there is no place for the lapsed within a community of Christian saints. Clarke relates this opinion to the Stoic view of a community of sages.⁸³ Trillitzsch suggests that Novatian's Stoic leanings caused him to lack Christian forgiveness.⁸⁴ It seems, then, at least in this instance, that Novatian preferred the uncompromising stance of earlier Greek Stoics to Seneca's gentler approach. According to Diogenes Laertius the Stoics were not merciful, made no allowance for anyone and never relaxed the penalty fixed by law.⁸⁵ Seneca's teaching is milder than that of his predecessors. He refutes the suggestion that the Stoic school is *dura nimis*.⁸⁶ Only ill informed people, according to Seneca, believe that Stoics are excessively harsh and unlikely to be merciful.⁸⁷ St. Cyprian, it would seem, should be included amongst those who were "ill informed". He claimed that Stoicism held that the wise man would not be swayed by pity. Seneca however, insists that no other school is as gentle or as concerned for the common good.⁸⁸ It is the duty of Stoics to serve others and not only themselves.⁸⁹ It requires a clear mind to arrive at the correct decision; a mind that is clouded by distress or sadness, or pity, is not in the best condition to decide the appropriate course of action in a given situation.⁹⁰ Here Seneca has softened the teachings of Zeno and Chrysippus.⁹¹

Like Minucius and St. Cyprian, Novatian does not refer to Seneca by name.⁹²

⁸² Cyprian, *Epp.* LV. 16 and LX. 3; Trillitzsch, *Seneca*. I, p. 129.

⁸³ *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, Vol. III, translated and annotated by G. W. Clarke, Ancient Christian Writers, The Works of the Fathers in Translation, no. 46, New York: Newman Press, 1986, p. 188.

⁸⁴ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, pp. 129-130. Colish believes that the Stoic influence on Novatian, as with that on Cyprian, has been overstated by modern scholars (*The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 35).

⁸⁵ D. L. VII. 123.

⁸⁶ Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 2. See also Chapter 3. 2 above.

⁸⁷ Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 2.

⁸⁸ *Sed nulla secta benignior leniorque est, nulla amantior hominum et communis boni attentior...* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 3).

⁸⁹ *ut propositum sit usui esse et auxilio nec sibi tantum, sed uniuersis singulisque consulere* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 3).

⁹⁰ *non potest autem magnus (sc. animus) esse idem ac maestus. Maeror contundit mentes, abicit, contrahit* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 5); *numquam autem liquidum sincerumque ex turbido uenit* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. vi. 1). I. G. Kidd, *Posidonius II. The Commentary: (ii) Fragments 150-293*, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 560.

⁹¹ See, for example, Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian*, vol. III, for references to this Stoic ideal.

⁹² Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 129f.

4. 5 Lactantius

Lactantius was well acquainted with pagan authors, both Greek and Roman. His knowledge of Christian writing was not as extensive, possibly because he converted as an adult,⁹³ although he was familiar with the works of Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Cyprian. His work, *Diuinae institutiones*, is the first attempt in Latin to set out a systematic description of Christianity.⁹⁴ Like Minucius, Lactantius directs his apology to pagans, but not only to pagans.⁹⁵ Lactantius is concerned about Christian backsliding and is especially worried that Christian members of the educated classes will be ensnared by the ancient literature.⁹⁶ This was in fact a danger to which St. Jerome felt he was exposed and a fault for which he was criticised by some of his contemporaries.⁹⁷

Like Minucius, Lactantius avoids arguments from Scripture.⁹⁸ In contrast to Minucius, however, Lactantius does not emphasise the close agreement on so many points between Stoicism and Christianity in order to demonstrate to his pagan readership the ease with which they could convert.⁹⁹ He prefers to emphasise the superiority of Christian belief.¹⁰⁰ He is prepared to admit that occasionally philosophers did express the truth, but only because they had stumbled across it by accident.¹⁰¹

In contrast to the practice of Minucius, Cyprian and Novatian, Lactantius does acknowledge Seneca by name and also notes the source of the quotes he uses.¹⁰² This is not, however, his invariable habit. Sometimes he employs the same material from Seneca that Minucius Felix also found useful and in these cases Lactantius does not acknowledge the original source.¹⁰³ Lausberg argues against the theory that there was once a Senecan epitome that was used by both authors,

⁹³ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 131.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* V. i. 8-9, 15f; Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 39.

⁹⁶ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* V. i. 9-11.

⁹⁷ See p. 174 below.

⁹⁸ Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 39.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 132.

¹⁰³ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 45.

and denies also any suggestion that there existed a Christian apology (now lost) that quoted Seneca.¹⁰⁴ He proposes instead that both Minucius and Lactantius used Seneca directly, with Lactantius filling in what he perceived to be gaps in Minucius' arguments.¹⁰⁵

Lactantius claims that Seneca ended his *Exhortations*, a work now lost, with a wonderful sentiment that he quotes.

*Magnum nescio quid, maiusque quam cogitari potest, numen est, cui uiuendo operam damus. Huic nos approbemus. Nam nihil prodest inclusam esse conscientiam: patemur deo.*¹⁰⁶

Lactantius is full of praise for Seneca's perception, a perception gained without knowledge of Christianity (*uera religio*, in Lactantius' words), a perception to rival that of one who does have the advantage of knowing God. No Christian, then, could have phrased it better.¹⁰⁷ Seneca had grasped the truth that God's power is greater than the human imagination can conceive.¹⁰⁸ If only Seneca had had the benefit of proper instruction, he would have been Christian.¹⁰⁹ In Lausberg's opinion it was Seneca's own personality as revealed in his writings that drew Lactantius to this conclusion, rather than the Stoic philosophy he expounded.¹¹⁰ Lactantius was under no illusions. He was aware that Seneca was not Christian but a Stoic philosopher and a pagan. The number of times he reminds his audience of this fact is perhaps an indication that he felt that it would be easy to gain the impression that Seneca in fact had been a Christian.¹¹¹ While stressing the point to his readers he is, of course, also reminding himself of Seneca's true status. Seneca, as well as certain other philosophers, had reached the truth and almost grasped it, they but were held back

¹⁰⁴ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 46f.

¹⁰⁵ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. xxiv. 12. For further discussion, see Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. xxiv. 13 (trans. Bowen and Garnsey).

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. xxiv. 14 (trans. Bowen and Garnsey).

¹¹⁰ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, pp. 26-27.

¹¹¹ ... *qui* (sc. *Seneca*) *ex Romanis uel accerrimus Stoicus fuit* (Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 1. v. 26); ... *Seneca, omnium Stoicorum acutissimus...* (Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* II. viii. 23); Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 25f.

by their inability to abandon traditional beliefs.¹¹² It was Lactantius' opinion that Seneca said much about god that was similar to what Christians believed about their God.¹¹³ These comments follow quotations from Seneca on the power of god and on his creation of the world, doctrines of which Lactantius approves.¹¹⁴

Despite his praise of pagan philosophy for the insights it had acquired Lactantius also found much to criticise. He condemns the Stoics, for example, for their lack of pity and for their inhuman detachment from their fellows.¹¹⁵ This was a common misinterpretation of the Stoic doctrine of ἀγπάθεια according to Seneca, one that he had been anxious to correct.¹¹⁶ Lactantius then sets out the Christian ideal of charity to all those in need.¹¹⁷ It is clear that not all Christians lived up to Lactantius' ideal, otherwise there would have been no need for Hermas' strictures against his wealthy fellow Christians who are reluctant to help their poorer brethren.¹¹⁸

What Lactantius has to say on Christian charity is similar to Seneca's views on the duty owed by one human being to another.¹¹⁹ Lactantius' formulation gains impact from the fact that it is set out in the one place.¹²⁰ Seneca's teaching on the subject is scattered throughout his works and so loses much of its effectiveness.¹²¹ Although Lactantius criticises Roman society in general and Cicero in particular for extending assistance only to those from whom some sort of return can be expected,¹²² he himself hopes for a reward from his God, albeit an other-worldly and spiritual reward rather than a concrete one in this life.¹²³ It is difficult to believe that Lactantius was unaware of Seneca's views on the unity of humanity, so similar to his own, although it is possible. It has already been noted that Seneca's thoughts on the topic are scattered, and

¹¹² Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. v. 28 (translated by Bowen and Garnsey).

¹¹³ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. v. 28 (translated by Bowen and Garnsey).

¹¹⁴ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. v. 26-27.

¹¹⁵ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. x. 11-12; Bowen and Garnsey, *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, p. 350, with note 37.

¹¹⁶ See p. 165 with note 86 above.

¹¹⁷ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. x. 9; xi. 1, 3, 13.

¹¹⁸ See p. 19 6 below.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 3. 2 above.

¹²⁰ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. x-xi.

¹²¹ Seneca, *Epp.* V. 4, IX. 3, XLVIII. 2; *De clem.* II. v. 3; *De ira* I. v. 2; *De uita beata* XXIV. 3; *De ben.* II. x-xi, for example.

¹²² Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. xi. 6-12.

¹²³ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. xii. 2.

scattered widely, throughout his works. If Lactantius was not familiar with the whole Senecan corpus it is possible that he had missed the references. It is also possible that, having just condemned the Stoic position, Lactantius considered that it would be inadvisable at this point to quote Seneca with approval.

In common with other Christian writers, Lactantius condemns that favourite Roman pastime, the gladiatorial games.¹²⁴ He criticises pagan philosophers for not also condemning the bloodshed. In fact some did, Seneca amongst them.¹²⁵ Here then is another means by which Seneca could have come to be regarded as Christian, or at least a sympathiser. Pagan philosophers, so the argument might run, do not criticise the bloodletting of the games. But Seneca did, therefore Seneca cannot have been a pagan.

Like some other Christian thinkers, Lactantius claims to be opposed to self-killing,¹²⁶ suggesting, like St. Augustine, that to commit suicide is to be guilty of murder.¹²⁷ He even argues that suicide should be considered a more serious crime than murder.¹²⁸ Yet further investigation reveals that in many ways Lactantius is closer to the Stoic Seneca than to the Christian saint on this question. St. Augustine condemns both Cato and his motive.¹²⁹ Lactantius condemns Cato's self-inflicted death as *summum nefas*, while yet admitting, albeit grudgingly, that the Stoic hero's stated reason was perhaps a defensible motive for his decision to die, a motive that Lactantius also regarded as at least understandable.¹³⁰ Although Lactantius is prepared to accept the validity of Cato's supposed motive, he questions its sincerity, accusing the Stoic of hypocrisy.¹³¹ According to Lactantius Cato's real motives for killing himself were, firstly, to follow Stoic doctrine and secondly to promote his own reputation by committing a notable crime.¹³² For that reason he should be included in the list of philosophers whom Lactantius labels murderers

¹²⁴ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* VI. xx. 8; Bowen and Garnsey, *Lactantius*. Divine Institutes, p. 374, note 71.

¹²⁵ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 145f, with note 54 on p. 146. See also Chapter 3. 5 above.

¹²⁶ See Appendix A, sections 5 and 6 below.

¹²⁷ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 6.

¹²⁸ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 7.

¹²⁹ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxiv.

¹³⁰ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 8.

¹³¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 11.

¹³² *ibid.*

because they killed themselves.¹³³ Cleanthes, Chrysippus and Zeno, claims Lactantius, committed suicide because they believed that after death their souls would be transferred to heaven,¹³⁴ Empedocles threw himself into an erupting Etna at night so that it would be thought that his sudden disappearance meant that he had joined the gods,¹³⁵ and Theombrotus¹³⁶ flung himself off a cliff because he trusted Plato.¹³⁷

Like the later Christian writers discussed in Appendix A, Lactantius' condemnation of suicide is not absolute. He considered that a desire to die free rather than to live under an autocracy was, if not an acceptable motive for killing oneself, at least an understandable one.¹³⁸ He was forced to question Cato's stated grounds for his decision to die so that he could include the Stoic hero in the group of philosophers who killed themselves for ignoble reasons. It is Cato, and only Cato, in this chapter whose own stated motive Lactantius mentions only to dismiss. This detail, as well as the fact that he appears three times in course of the discussion,¹³⁹ indicates that Lactantius saw the need to justify his condemnation.

It is possible that Lactantius himself was convinced but knew that his readers needed to be persuaded of the Roman hero's guilt. Lactantius was aware that he was arguing against deep and long-held Roman convictions, convictions to which he found himself still attracted. He had to persuade his audience that the revered Stoic hero was in error; even if his stated motive was sincere; Caesar's renowned clemency would have ensured that Cato could have continued to live a virtuous life. Cato, however, had not been sincere. His real motive was to acquire a great reputation, a motive in which he succeeded.

¹³³ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 6.

¹³⁴ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 5.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 9; Bowen and Garnsey, *Lactantius*. Divine Institutes, p. 203, note 63.

¹³⁷ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 9.

¹³⁸ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 8.

¹³⁹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xviii. 5, 8, 11-12. *et hic (sc. Seneca) tamen aliquam moriendi causam uidetur habuisse, odium seruitutis* (Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* I. xviii. 8 [C.S.E.L. XIX]).

Lactantius goes so far as to advise his audience to read Seneca.¹⁴⁰ The audience to whom he extends this invitation is theoretically non-Christian. Lactantius directed the *Divine Institutes* to an educated pagan readership whose members spoke Latin.¹⁴¹ This audience would, he hoped, include his former students, some of whom must, by the time of writing, have held positions of power and influence.¹⁴² Lactantius expected that the criticism levelled against the evils of a polytheistic society by a powerful figure of that society, a man, moreover who had been a pagan philosopher, would carry more weight than anything he could write. How many pagans would have read *Divine Institutes*? One has to suspect that the readership was at first largely Christian, so, in fact, Lactantius is recommending Seneca's works as suitable reading for Christians. Lactantius' ambition to bring Christian belief into mainstream intellectual discussion is not as far-fetched as it may appear. Greek philosophy had long demonstrated a critical interest in Judaism and often listed Moses amongst the great law-givers.¹⁴³ Similar attention in the Roman context was feasible. The author of the letters between 'Seneca' and 'Paul' imagines just such a scenario. In the first letter of his collection he has his Seneca discussing Christian writings with Lucilius.¹⁴⁴ Highlighting similarities between Seneca's version of Stoic morality and Christian values could only help in promoting the idea that the Christian belief system improved on Senecan moral principles.

It is possible that Constantine's conversion encouraged pagans to read Christian works, as ambitious 'new men' sought imperial patronage by adopting, or at least studying, the emperor's religious beliefs. Could this have been a factor in Lactantius' decision to produce an epitome of his own work? The summary is a fraction of the size of the original, yet it contains all the material that Lactantius believed to be the essentials of Christianity.¹⁴⁵ Despite Lactantius' claim that he had to omit so much from his original work to be able to compress seven books into one,¹⁴⁶ he still thinks that Seneca is sufficiently important to be included in the abridged work.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ *qui uolet scire omnia, Senecae libros in manum sumat* (Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* V. ix. 19).

¹⁴¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. xviif; Bowen and Garnsey (trans), *Lactantius*. *Divine Institutes*, pp. 6, 51.

¹⁴² Bowen and Garnsey (trans.), *Lactantius*. *Divine Institutes*, p. 2.

¹⁴³ Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians*, p. 20f.

¹⁴⁴ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae, Ep.* I, with note 2. See also p. 59 above.

¹⁴⁵ Lactantius, *Epitome* preface.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Lactantius, *Epitome* 4.

Regardless of the motives that led to the production of this abridgement there can be no doubt of its value to a pagan ambitious for a career in the imperial service and optimistic that some familiarity with Christian teaching would bring him preferment.

Any well-educated and influential Christian of the first centuries (and later) who quoted Seneca approvingly by name could cause his reader or listener to believe that Seneca's ideas are acceptable to Christians. It is a small step from there to imagining that Seneca had Christian sympathies and a further small step to believing that he had actually been converted. It was difficult for such a Christian to accept that Seneca's ideas sprang solely from pagan philosophy. It seemed more likely that he had fallen under the influence of a Christian teacher. Lactantius' opinion that Seneca would have been Christian if only he had received proper instruction could easily have inspired the anonymous author of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul with the belief that St. Paul had supplied such instruction. Paul was, after all, a close contemporary and with a little imagination the two men could be linked by Seneca's brother, Gallio, before whom Paul had appeared when he was governor of Achaia.¹⁴⁸ No ancient writer actually mentions this connection. It is, however, difficult to believe that it was not noticed, at least after the appearance of Luke/Acts. Seneca's *De remediis*, known to Tertullian and other early Latin Christian writers, was dedicated to *Gallio frater*, a dedication preserved in the surviving epitome.

Lactantius admits that Stoicism claimed to be open to all, free, enslaved, men, women, and that both Plato and Epicurus welcomed all, regardless of wealth or status.¹⁴⁹ This was true in theory, according to Lactantius, but in reality it was impractical because years had to be devoted to acquiring the skills essential to the study of philosophy.¹⁵⁰ Only the true religion, by which of course he means Christianity, is genuinely open to all.¹⁵¹ Minucius Felix, on the other hand, maintains anyone, regardless of age, sex or rank has the ability to reason and understand.¹⁵² There have even been philosophers who were considered ignorant members of the lower classes

¹⁴⁸ Acts 18. 12f; See also p. 206 below.

¹⁴⁹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xxv. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xxv. 9f.

¹⁵¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* III. xxvi; Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 127f.

¹⁵² Minucius Felix, *Octavius* XVI. 5.

before their genius was recognised.¹⁵³ Here he is in agreement with Seneca. Lausberg, in fact, suggests that *Octavius* XVI. 5 is dependent on Seneca, *Epistles* XLIV. 1-3 and XC. 1.¹⁵⁴ There are several other places, too, in which Seneca maintains that philosophy is open to all, regardless of age or education.¹⁵⁵ He does not specifically include women, but neither does he exclude them. There are hints that women should not be barred from the study of philosophy; his criticism of his father for preventing his mother from engaging in a deeper study of philosophy, to give just one example.¹⁵⁶

Lausberg suggests that the first sentence of *Divine Institutes* I. vii. 13, words that introduce an acknowledged quotation from Seneca's lost *Exhortationes*,¹⁵⁷ is not part of that work and is probably not Senecan at all.¹⁵⁸

“But because it is impossible for anything created not to have started its existence at some time, it follows that because there was nothing preceding him he himself was created by himself before everything else, and that is why he is called ‘self-grown’ by Apollo and ‘self-generated,’ ‘unbegotten’ and ‘unmade’ by the Sibyl.”¹⁵⁹

Lactantius then goes on to quote from Seneca's *Exhortationes*.¹⁶⁰ Such a combination demonstrates Lactantius' method of removing passages, whether related or not, from their original context and linking them in such a way as to give the impression, whether intended or not, of Seneca as proto-Christian. Seneca's ideas could also be combined with those of others to the same effect.

In this discussion it is unimportant whether this work is Seneca's. The important point here is that Lactantius ascribed it to that philosopher. Nor is it important if Lactantius had a lapse of

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 143.

¹⁵⁵ Seneca, *Epp.* LXXII. 3, LXXVI. 1f, LXXXVIII. 32f, for example.

¹⁵⁶ Seneca, *Ad Helviam* XVII. 3f.

¹⁵⁷ *uerum quia fieri non potest quin id quod sit aliquando esse coeperit, consequens est ut, quoniam nihil ante illum fuit, ipse ante omnia ex se ipso procreatus* (Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. vii. 13).

¹⁵⁸ Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 95. See also Bowen and Garnsey, *Lactantius*. *Divine Institutes*, p. 74, note 51.

¹⁵⁹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. vii. 13 (Bowen and Garnsey [trans]).

¹⁶⁰ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I. vii. 13.

memory and forgot who was its author and assumed it was Seneca. The significant aspect is that it was an opinion that Lactantius approved and one that he assumed was Senecan.

4. 6 St. Ambrose

The bishop of Milan combined ethical concepts from several philosophical systems.¹⁶¹

He frequently makes use of the Stoics for ideas and methods of argumentation in ethics, his main field of interest.¹⁶² His most frequently used source for Stoicism is, however, Cicero rather than Seneca.

Ambrose is prepared to admit that the Stoics preached the brotherhood of man.¹⁶³ He maintains, however, that they had been influenced by Scripture.¹⁶⁴

There is little evidence of Senecan influence in the works of Ambrose. The exception is, possibly, his consolation on the death of his brother.¹⁶⁵ The Stoic tradition on which he depends in this work, however, could have been as readily derived from Cicero.¹⁶⁶

4. 7 St. Jerome

St. Jerome had nightmares that he would be judged harshly by God for his love of pagan literature.¹⁶⁷ He suffered from pangs of conscience not only because of his original pagan education but also because of his continued affection for that learning. His guilty conscience was further aggravated by attacks from Christian opponents.¹⁶⁸ If, however, the Roman philosopher had been on intimate terms with the apostle to the Gentiles, then there could be no grounds for an objection to reading his works. Jerome was only too happy to believe in the friendship and had neither reason nor desire to question it.

¹⁶¹ Colish, *The Stoic Tradition II*, p. 50.

¹⁶² Colish, *The Stoic Tradition II*, p. 51.

¹⁶³ St. Ambrose, *De officiis* I. xxviii. 132 (Ivor J. Davidson [ed.], *Ambrose. De officiis*, vol.I, Introduction, Text and Translation, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 195).

¹⁶⁴ St. Ambrose, *De officiis* I. xxviii. 134..

¹⁶⁵ Trillitzsch, *Seneca I*, p. 162.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXII. 30.

¹⁶⁸ St. Jerome, *Apologia aduersus libros Rufini* I. 30.

Jerome's original education was confined to Latin literature.¹⁶⁹ He appears to have been familiar with most, if not all, of Seneca's work that still survives, the *Epistulae morales*, the tragedies, and the *consolationes* as well as the other dialogues.¹⁷⁰ He studied Greek as an adult so that he could read Christian exegesis in Greek.¹⁷¹ He did not read pagan literature in that language.¹⁷² His apparent familiarity with the poets and philosophers of ancient Greece is owed to Cicero, Seneca and Brutus, as he himself acknowledges.¹⁷³

Ciceronianus es, non Christianus seems to indicate that Cicero was his favourite author although the phrase has a suspiciously rhetorical ring.¹⁷⁴ Jerome writes also that *Plautus sumebatur in manibus*, excusing himself for preferring these inappropriate works by explaining that he was repelled by the uncultivated style of the prophets.¹⁷⁵ His conscience, and his dream, as well as the censure of his Christian critics, troubled him so much that he vowed to desert the pagan authors, a vow he failed to keep.¹⁷⁶ On the contrary he tried to justify himself. In a letter to his friend, the orator Magnus, he appealed to the example of Biblical figures from Moses to St. Paul who did not hesitate to employ pagan literature and philosophy in their arguments against non-believers.¹⁷⁷

In accordance with Stoic teaching Seneca recommends participation in everyday life, including marriage and the raising of children.¹⁷⁸ Jerome, an enthusiastic advocate for life-long virginity, or at least celibacy, uses Seneca's examples of marital fidelity to argue against marriage and especially remarriage.¹⁷⁹ Where Seneca praised chastity St. Jerome demands celibacy,¹⁸⁰ adding his own editorial voice to what seems to be a quotation, or at least a paraphrase, from Seneca.¹⁸¹

¹⁶⁹ *De dogmatibus eorum (sc. Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles), non de libris locutus sum, quae potui in Cicerone, Bruto, ac Seneca discere* (St. Jerome, *Apologia aduersus libros Rufini* III. 39); Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics*. p. 93.

¹⁷⁰ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 152f.

¹⁷¹ Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics*, p. 93.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ St. Jerome, *Aduersus Rufinum* III. 39; Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics*, pp. 93, 177.

¹⁷⁴ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 144.

¹⁷⁵ St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXII. 30.

¹⁷⁶ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, pp. 144-145.

¹⁷⁷ St. Jerome, *Ep.* LXX. 2.

¹⁷⁸ See Chapter 3. 4 above.

¹⁷⁹ St. Jerome, *In Iouinianum* I. 49.

*Viros consulatus illustrat...Multa sunt, quae praeclara ingenia nobilitent. Mulieris uirtus proprie pudicitia est. Haec Lucretiam Bruto aequauit, nescias an et praetulerit.*¹⁸²

There follows a list of other virtuous pagan Roman women. Jerome thus represents the Stoic sage as being in agreement with his own views and therefore as a philosopher who came close to being a Christian.¹⁸³ It is a near approach only; Jerome is not claiming Seneca as a Christian, despite his description of the Roman Stoic as *noster* at the beginning of *In Iouinianum* 49.¹⁸⁴ This is not to claim that Jerome is following Seneca rather than St. Paul, merely that he is making it appear that Seneca shares his view.

The influence of Seneca's inclusion in St. Jerome's *De uiris illustribus* can be overemphasised in terms of the philosopher's standing in the opinion of early Latin Christianity. Its importance in the middle ages is attested by the number of manuscripts of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul that include the notice.¹⁸⁵ Jerome, rather, was reacting to a perception that was firmly established by his own time. He himself cites the correspondence between the philosopher and the apostle as the determining factor that persuaded him to include Seneca in his *catalogus sanctorum*. He was prepared to admire Seneca for the austerity of his lifestyle, but acknowledges no approval for his philosophical views. The philosopher's connection with St. Paul, however, renders his works suitable for Christians to read.

4. 8 St. Augustine

Seneca was still being read in North Africa in the last half of the fourth century. Augustine relates his disappointing meeting with the Manichean bishop, Faustus.¹⁸⁶ Augustine had been told that Faustus was a learned man who would be able to discuss with him the various problems related to Manichean cosmology that were troubling him.¹⁸⁷ He quickly discovered, however, that the much-admired Faustus, far from being the scholar he expected, was a man of limited

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 150.

¹⁸² St. Jerome, *In Iouinianum* I. 49.

¹⁸³ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 150.

¹⁸⁴ See p. 160 above. This disagrees with the view of Trillitzsch (*Seneca* I, p. 151).

¹⁸⁵ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 8f.

¹⁸⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions* V. iii, vi.

¹⁸⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions* V. iii.

education.¹⁸⁸ According to Augustine, he knew some of Cicero's speeches, very few of Seneca's books and some poetry, as well as the treatises on Manichean doctrine that had been written in Latin.¹⁸⁹ Augustine's criticism thus implies the expectation that a poorly educated man like Faustus would be acquainted with some of Seneca's work and that a well-educated person should be familiar with it. Trillitzsch suggests that at this period, at least in North Africa, Seneca was included in the basic curriculum.¹⁹⁰ He further suggests that Augustine's own knowledge of Stoicism was gleaned from Seneca,¹⁹¹ a conclusion disputed by Colish.¹⁹²

Augustine's brief comment does not, unfortunately, tell us which of Seneca's works were studied, nor for what reason. Were they used to demonstrate, for example, Seneca's pointed style in contrast to that of Cicero? Was Seneca used as a convenient Latin source for a survey of Stoic philosophy? Perhaps both aspects were included in the course of study. If Seneca's philosophical maxims were read then students would have provided a ready market for Senecan epitomes such as that culled from Seneca's *De remediis*. It is even possible that St. Augustine's own acquaintance with Seneca's work was largely gained from similar abridgements. According to Hagendahl, "Augustine mentions Seneca only a few times and in a way that does not go to show that he was well acquainted with him."¹⁹³ There is scholarly disagreement on how well Augustine knew Seneca's work and on how much he was influenced by Seneca's ideas.¹⁹⁴ Hagendahl's opinion, for example, is that Augustine had little interest in any of Seneca's works, with the exception of his *De superstitione*.¹⁹⁵ Trillitzsch, on the other hand, claims that although it is possible that Augustine was not aware that Seneca the philosopher was also the tragedian, he did know and use Seneca's philosophical works.¹⁹⁶ The fact that Augustine criticises Faustus for his acquaintance with only "very few" of Seneca's books implies that he regarded his own knowledge as being more extensive.

¹⁸⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions* V. vi.

¹⁸⁹ *legerat... paucissimos Senecae libros* (St. Augustine, *Confessions* V. vi)

¹⁹⁰ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 162.

¹⁹¹ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 169.

¹⁹² Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* II, p.142f.

¹⁹³ Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, p. 677.

¹⁹⁴ Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, pp. 678-679.

¹⁹⁵ Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, pp. 680, 694.

¹⁹⁶ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 169.

In the work entitled *De utilitate credendi*, Augustine deploys a Stoic argument to justify Christian leadership,¹⁹⁷ but changes it subtly. All men are either fools or wise and it is preferable that fools obey the wise rather than rely on themselves.¹⁹⁸ That humanity is divided between the foolish and the wise is a standard Stoic maxim. But at least in Seneca's hands, and Seneca does appear to have been Augustine's major source of information on the belief system of the Stoa, it is possible, although a formidable and arduous task, to achieve the status of a *sapiens*. Seneca further maintained that adults must be autonomous. They should model their behaviour on that of a Cato or Laelius, but a Stoic needed no master.¹⁹⁹

De utilitate is addressed to a friend who had been seduced by the Manicheans. St. Augustine is attempting to recall him to orthodoxy. The letter, then, is addressed to another Christian (albeit an heretical one in Augustine's eyes) and is also intended for a wider Christian audience rather than for pagans. Augustine's hope was that it would influence others who had fallen into heresy.²⁰⁰ The Bishop of Hippo's opinion that a Stoic example is appropriate is an indication of how pervasive was Stoic thought in Christian communities. The orthodox Augustine employs a Stoic argument that he expects to convince the heterodox. Seneca is not named but some of the ideas expressed are also promoted by him, the advice to model oneself on a hero, for example. Augustine appears to be casting Christ as the *sapiens* who is to be not only emulated, but also obeyed. Here is an example of the Christianisation of Senecan thought. Seneca advised following a suitable role model, but did not recommend obedience.

As part of his campaign to have suicide outlawed Augustine advances Stoic arguments to argue against the widespread opinion, supported by the Stoa and especially by Seneca, that suicide was sometimes an acceptable response.²⁰¹ It was not only pagan thinkers who endorsed and even recommended suicide under certain circumstances. Christians did likewise. Several Christian

¹⁹⁷ St. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi* XII. 27.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Cogita, quantum nobis exempla bona prosint; scies magnorum uirorum non minus praesentiam esse utilem quam memoriam* (Seneca, *Ep.* CII. 30). See also p. 123 above.

²⁰⁰ *Quae ut tibi prosint... omnibusque omnino quorum in manus forte deuenerint* (St. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi* I. 1)

²⁰¹ See Chapter 3. 3 above and Appendix A, section 3 below.

teachers condemned suicide in general, only to applaud it in the specific instance of a woman threatened with rape. Approval was also extended to women who killed themselves after they had been unable to escape their assailants.²⁰² Augustine's opposition to this opinion is stated in terms that are reminiscent of Seneca. Injury to the body does not necessarily imply injury to the soul, or, in the specific case of rape, to one's chastity.

Sed cum pudicitia uirtus sit animi comitemque habeat fortitudinem, qua potius quaelibet mala tolerare quam malo consentire decernit, nullus autem magnanimus et pudicus in potestate habeat, quid de sua carne fiat, sed tantum quid adnuat mente uel renuat, quis eadem sana mente putauerit perdere se pudicitiam, si forte in adprehensa et oppressa carne sua exerceatur et expleatur libido non sua?

Si enim hoc modo pudicitia perit, profecto pudicitia uirtus animi non erit, nec pertinebit ad ea bona quibus bene uiuitur, sed in bonis corporis numerabitur, qualia sunt uires, pulchritudo sana ualetudo ac si quid huius modi est; quae bona, etiamsi minuuntur, bonam iustamque uitam omnino non minuunt. Quod si tale aliquid est pudicitia, ut quid pro illa, ne amittatur, etiam cum periculo corporis laboratur? Si autem animi bonum est, etiam oppresso corpore non amittitur.

Neque enim eo corpus sanctum est, quod eius membra sunt integra, aut eo, quod nullo contrectantur adtactu, cum possint diuersis casibus etiam uulnerata uim perpeti, et medici aliquando saluti opitulantes haec ibi faciant, quae horret aspectus.²⁰³

Seneca also had argued that although one's body can be in peril of injury or slavery the soul remains whole and free.

Hoc (sc. corpus) itaque oppono fortunae, in quo resistat, nec per illud ad me ullum transire uulnus sino. Quicquid in me potest iniuriam pati, hoc est. In hoc obnoxio

²⁰² See Appendix A, sections 5 and 6 below.

²⁰³ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xviii.

*domicilio animus liber habitat.*²⁰⁴ *Corpora obnoxia sunt et adscripta dominis; mens quidem sui iuris.*²⁰⁵

Seneca does not address the specific problem that rape posed to women. It is possible that, unlike the Christian writers mentioned above he did not regard this crime as being in a category all its own or as a more serious assault than any other physical or mental injury. What evidence there is suggests that this was the general opinion amongst Roman pagans at least in pre-Christian times.²⁰⁶

Augustine quotes with approval a prayer he ascribes to Seneca.²⁰⁷

*Duc, summe pater altique dominator poli,
Quocumque placuit, nulla parendi mora est.
Adsum impiger: fac nolle, comitabor gemens
Malusque patiar, facere quod licuit bono.
Ducent uolentem fata, nolentem trahunt.*

Augustine points out that Seneca is using the *fata* of the last line to stand for *summe pater* of the first line.²⁰⁸ He repeats the final line, *Ducent uolentem fata, nolentem trahunt*, as an indication of his appreciation of the philosopher's insight. God has the power to bend humans to his will; the good man (*bonus*) obeys willingly. This verse is contained in one of Seneca's letters to Lucilius.²⁰⁹ Here is some evidence that Augustine was familiar with at least one of Seneca's letters on morality.

Augustine's recollection, if he is relying on memory as he implies,²¹⁰ is almost word perfect.

*Duc, o parens celsique dominator poli,
Quocumque placuit; nulla parendi mora est.
Adsum inpiger. Fac nolle, comitabor gemens*

²⁰⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXV. 21.

²⁰⁵ Seneca, *De ben.* III. xx. 1.

²⁰⁶ See Appendix A below.

²⁰⁷ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* V. viii.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* CVII. 11.

²¹⁰ *Annaei Senecae sunt, nisi fallor, hi uersus* (St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* V. viii).

Malusque patiar, facere quod licuit bono.

Ducunt uolentem fata, nolentem trahunt.

Yet he apparently does not remember that in fact Seneca himself attributes the lines to Cleanthes. He has followed Cicero's example by rendering the lines in Latin.²¹¹ It is possible that Augustine had memorised the lines but had forgotten the surrounding context. Perhaps he preferred to believe that such a Christian-sounding prayer had originated with Seneca, who, it could be claimed, had been sympathetic towards Christianity and inspired by Christian belief, rather than that it had been composed by a Greek philosopher whose life-time long predated the birth of Jesus. It is also possible that Augustine might have read the lines in another author who attributed them to Seneca. Any Christian reading this section of Augustine's great work would be entitled to think that Seneca was being endorsed by St. Augustine.

In the following chapter of *De ciuitate Dei* Augustine rejects Cicero's denial of the possibility of foreknowledge.²¹² Augustine detested this denial even more than the Stoics had.²¹³ Divine knowledge of the future is not, as Cicero would have it, incompatible with free will.²¹⁴ According to Augustine, in contradiction to Cicero, it is possible for God to have foreknowledge and for humans to have free will. He is less critical about the Stoic use of the word *fatum*. It would be an acceptable term if only its derivation were understood.²¹⁵ The name is, however, too closely bound to astrology, a study that Augustine condemns, therefore he himself would avoid its use.²¹⁶ The Stoics, he writes, employ the word to mean *illud causarum ordo*. Seneca defines *fatum* as *nihil aliud sit, quam series implexa causarum*.²¹⁷ *Deus* is the first cause on which all others depend.²¹⁸ Seneca maintains that *fatum* is one of the many terms that can be applied to

²¹¹ Seneca, *Ep.* CVII. 10.

²¹² St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* V. ix.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁷ Seneca, *De ben.* IV. vii. 2.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

deus.²¹⁹ Augustine also notes this use, applauding the sentiment, but rejecting the word because of its common application to astrology.²²⁰

In a letter to Macedonius Augustine quotes from Seneca to corroborate an argument in support of which he also calls on the Gospel of Matthew.²²¹ He describes Seneca as having lived at the time of the Apostles and as having been a correspondent of St. Paul.²²² If Augustine believed that his correspondent was ignorant of when Seneca lived then noting that his lifetime corresponded with that of the apostles makes sense in a Christian setting. There was no need, however, to mention the correspondence with St. Paul. Linking the Stoic philosopher in this fashion not only with the apostles but even with one of the Gospels cannot help but give the impression that Seneca was a Christian. Augustine thereby reinforces the impression of a Christian Seneca that he had inherited.

4. 9 Seneca at the Council of Tours

It was not only individual Christian thinkers who considered the Roman philosopher an appropriate person to quote or refer to. The institutional Church did likewise. Canon 15 of the second Council of Tours in 567 contains a Senecan citation that claims to be a direct quotation (*sicut ait Senica*):²²³

*Pessimum in eum uitium esse, qui in id, quod insanit, ceteros putat furere...*²²⁴

An editor's footnote states that the citation is not to be found in Seneca's surviving works.²²⁵

Trillitzsch suggests that the Canon is a combination of two maxims from *Liber de moribus*:²²⁶

*Hoc habet omnis adfectus, ut in quod ipse insanit, in idem etiam ceteros putet furere.*²²⁷

²¹⁹ Seneca, *De ben.* IV. vii. 1. See also p. 127 above.

²²⁰ ... *quia ipsam Dei uoluntatem vel potestatem fati nomine appellat, sententiam teneat, linguam corrigat* (St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* V. I).

²²¹ St. Augustine, *Ep.* CLIII. 14.

²²² *Seneca... qui temporibus Apostolorum fuit, cuius etiam quaedam ad Paulum apostolum leguntur epistolae* (St. Augustine, *Ep.* CLIII. 14 [Migne, *P.L.* 33, p. 659]).

²²³ 'Senica' is spelt thus.

²²⁴ *Concilia Galliae* A. 511 - A. 695, *Corpus Christianorum, Ser. Lat.* 148 A, C. de Clerq (ed), p. 181, Can. 15, 152-153.

²²⁵ *Lucius Annaeus Seneca, in cuius editionibus non inuenitur* (de Clerq [ed], *Corpus Christianorum, Ser. Lat.* 148 A, p.181, note on *Can.* 15).

²²⁶ Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 216.

²²⁷ *Liber de moribus* 35 (ed. Woelfflin) in Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I, p. 400.

and

*Maximum in eo uitium est, qui non melioribus uult placere, sed pluribus.*²²⁸

Friedrich's edition has different wording for both *sententiae*:

*Qui insanit ipse, furere credit ceteros.*²²⁹

*Vitium est pluribus placere malle, quam melioribus.*²³⁰

Sententia 35 in the editions of both Woelfflin and Friedrich express the same sentiment with slightly different wording and both are very similar to Canon 15. It is easy to see how the first five words of *Liber de moribus* 36 in Woelfflin's edition could have been taken, with minimal change, to begin the Canon. It is conceivable that the author of Canon 15 was attempting to quote from *Liber de moribus* and relied on a memory that proved to be inaccurate. It is also possible that the writer used one of the sources from which the *sententiae* of *De moribus* were originally derived, rather than a copy of the *Liber* itself. That source might well have contained the quote exactly as the canon has it. Woelfflin's edition of Seneca's *Liber de moribus* contains several examples of *sententiae* apparently derived from *Monita*, as edited by Woelfflin, in which two *sententiae* have been combined into one or where the *sententia* as preserved in *Monita* has been divided into two. The evidence of the Council of Tours adds weight to the belief that in the case of these two *sententiae* at least, something similar to the Woelfflin edition of *De moribus*, perhaps its source, provided the quotation from Seneca. It is even possible that the canon has preserved the original Seneca quote that has survived in an altered form in *Liber de moribus*. It must be admitted that there are other explanations for the discrepancy. The sentence could belong to that part of the Senecan corpus which has not come down to us; one of the missing *Epistulae morales*, to name only one possibility. The author might even have attributed to Seneca a quote from another source.

The important point for the purposes of this work is that a Christian in composing the official record of a Church council believed that he was quoting Seneca. Even more importantly he regarded Seneca as an appropriate authority to quote.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

²²⁹ *De moribus* 35 (ed. Friedrich) in Friedrich, *P.S.M.S.*, p. 88.

²³⁰ *De moribus* 36 (ed. Friedrich) in Friedrich, *P.S.M.S.*, p. 88.

4. 10 Conclusion

A succession of Christian thinkers writing over a time period of 150 years regarded Seneca favourably and sometimes enthusiastically. Tertullian termed him *Seneca saepe noster*, although the qualification was as often as not ignored in later ages. Lactantius believed that he would have been Christian if someone had shown him the way. Sentiments such as these inspired the author of the fictitious correspondence to compose his letters and ascribe them to Seneca and Paul.

St. Jerome, on the other hand, was not won over by Seneca's philosophy, although he did approve of his moderate life-style. It was the correspondence supposedly exchanged between Seneca and St. Paul that caused Seneca to be included in Jerome's *catalogus sanctorum*, the only pagan to be so honoured. St. Augustine is the only Christian thinker surveyed in this chapter who hints at the possibility that Seneca was sympathetic to Christian belief. He notes that although Seneca was critical of Judaism, he remained silent on Christianity because he did not want to condemn where he sympathised, but was unwilling to reveal his real thoughts.

Thus far the dissertation has established Seneca's status as Christian sympathiser in the eyes of some Latin-speaking Christians. It has investigated reasons for this evaluation in his life and career and in his philosophy. The following chapters consider other influences at work on the author of the fictitious correspondence. These influences relate to his own time. Some of these factors had an effect also on the reception of his work.

CHAPTER FIVE

Romanising St. Paul – and Christianity

*quippe cum scias te ciuem esse Romanum.*¹

We turn now to a consideration of the factors in Anonymous' own time that led to his portrayal of St. Paul and of the status of Christianity, and Christians, in first-century Rome. It will be necessary to provide an abbreviated account of the complex and tangled history of Jewish/Christian relationships up to the end of the fourth century. It is unknown much of this history was known to our author. There can be little doubt that he was aware of some of it.

It is part of the argument of this thesis that the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul was intended, perhaps by its author, perhaps by whoever was responsible for its introduction into the Christian community (if that was someone other than the author himself),² to demonstrate that Paul had abandoned the Judaism of his upbringing for Christianity, and the Greek of his Hellenised education for the Latin of his supposed Roman citizenship.³ The following discussion describes how the author of the correspondence went about this task and analyses some reasons he might have believed the exercise to be necessary.

The correspondence addresses various themes in pursuit of its objectives. One aim is to separate Paul from his Jewish inheritance. The author knows that Paul was a Jew but portrays him as having rejected Judaism in favour of Christianity. This is a point that could be emphasised in any explanation to those who required a commentary on various aspects of the correspondence. According to modern sociological theory St. Paul was, in fact, a convert.⁴ The correspondence is

¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. XII.

² I am accepting Barlow's interpretation of the evidence that indicates that the letters were written shortly before they appeared, that is, just before 392, and that all were written at the same time (Barlow (ed), *Epistolae*, p. 80). Barlow admits the possibility that there might have been more than one author (Barlow [ed], *Epistolae*, p. 92). Elliott questions the unity of the correspondence (Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 549).

³ Motives suggested for the creation of the correspondence are surveyed in Chapter 1, especially section 6.

⁴ See note 165 on p. 212 below.

in agreement with modern ideas on this point. Paul himself, however, acknowledged no conversion, claiming that he remained Jewish.⁵

Another problem identified by our anonymous author is the question of Paul's irregular education. Paul had not received the literary and rhetorical training taken for granted in a member of the high status groups of Roman society. In spite of this the author presents Paul as Seneca's social equal. The correspondence has 'Seneca' impress on 'Paul' the necessity of making good his educational shortcomings. The author portrays Seneca as the teacher who will remedy the situation by providing Paul with the rhetorical education essential to a member of Rome's ruling elite.

Language is critical. It is significant on the level of the elevated rhetoric referred to by the author of the fictitious letters. It is also important at the level of everyday discourse. This chapter addresses both aspects. The letter writer's more obvious concern is with Paul's acquisition of the Latin eloquence appropriate to imparting the Christian message. The language must be Latin as it is also part of the author's intention to present Latin as having been the language of Roman Christianity from as early a time as possible.

5. 1 Anonymous on St. Paul's Education

Ep. VII of the correspondence describes Paul's education as *non legitime*. The expression means no more than that Paul had not received the literary and rhetorical education that members of Rome's upper classes were expected to possess. It was not possible to participate in normal social exchanges at the upper levels of Roman society, nor to hold any official position, without such an education. Hence the outrage, and not only from Christians, caused by the Emperor Julian's proposed educational reforms.⁶ Paul's lack of proper training, then, provides the opportunity for the author to propose Seneca as Paul's tutor in good Latin style. In this way he portrays the two as social equals, but with Seneca holding the superior standing as instructor. In his last hours Seneca himself defined his role as *educator praeceptorque*, but to Nero, of course,

⁵ See pp. 211-212 below.

⁶ See p. 238f below.

not to St. Paul.⁷ This was an important relationship in this society, so important that Tacitus has Seneca liken his own death to the earlier murders of members of Nero's family for which the emperor was held responsible, specifically those of his mother and brother.⁸ Rhetoric was still an essential skill for Romans of the fourth century. We might regard what is said as being of greater importance than the way it is said. To Romans, however, poor rhetoric was a reflection of an unreliable character.⁹

Rome had a long history of naturalising aspects of the culture, including some religious beliefs and practices, of the peoples it conquered, especially that of the Greeks. This sometimes occurred despite the resistance of prominent Romans. Cato the Elder opposed the adoption of so many Greek practices. Yet his descendant was famed for his Stoicism, a Greek philosophy that had been Romanised. The anonymous author of the correspondence between 'Seneca' and 'St. Paul' follows a well-trodden path in his attempts to naturalise the Hellenised Jewish apostle and his religion. His insistence on the use of Latin is a product of his own time. Roman aristocrats of the first century were more likely than not to be bilingual. The fourth century, however, saw Greeks choosing to write in Latin, Claudian and Ammianus Marcellinus, for example. It is beyond the scope of this work to consider how and why this different emphasis on language occurred. The concern here is the Romanisation of St. Paul and the Latinisation of Christianity. The following discussion reviews the change in the language of Roman Christianity from Greek to Latin.

5. 2 St. Paul's Use of Greek

St. Paul's letter to the Romans is written, like all his letters, in Greek, despite the fact that his scribe bears a Roman name and he is corresponding with residents of Rome.¹⁰ The letter makes no mention of the possibility that it might have to be translated for a Latin-speaking audience. The Epistle to the Romans assumes a Greek readership. Other evidence indicates that Roman

⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 62.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ ...*Senecam... commissiones meras componere et harenam esse sine calce* (Suetonius, *Gaius* LIID); *talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis vita* (Seneca, *Ep.* CXIV. 2); *sed in eloquendo corrupta pleraque atque eo perniciosissima...* (Quintilian X. i. 129); St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXII. 30.

¹⁰ Romans 16. 22.

Christianity was predominantly Greek-speaking until at least the first half of the second century.¹¹ It is not until the middle of the second century that there were Latin speakers in any number.¹² Lampe suggests that Latin did not equal Greek as the language of the Roman church until the beginning of the third century and did not overtake it until the end of that century.¹³ Greek was not abolished as the language of the liturgy until the fourth century.¹⁴ At the time that the pseudonymous correspondence appeared, towards the end of the fourth century, Roman Christianity's Greek-speaking past was still recent. Willis suggests that the change was complete by 390, perhaps as early as 382.¹⁵ It is possible, then, that our anonymous author had personal memories of a Greek liturgy still in use in Rome, depending on how old he was when he composed his letters.¹⁶ With this recent background of Greek-speaking Christianity in Rome, and given our author's desire to promote Christianity as traditionally both Roman and Latin-speaking, it is no surprise that he wished to show his Christian hero, St. Paul, using Latin to correspond with his Roman hero, Seneca, who could just as easily have written in Greek.

The correspondence provides no clear evidence that its author was aware that St. Paul wrote his letters in Greek. There is one hint. *Ep.* VII has his Seneca write to Paul that he had been reading the letters addressed to the Galatians, Corinthians and Achaeans.¹⁷ Even if he were unsure whether Greek was spoken in Galatia and Corinth¹⁸ (and that does appear unlikely) he must have known that the Achaeans spoke Greek. He might not have been aware that Paul's Epistle to the Romans had also been written in Greek. It is possible that he knew only a Latin translation of the letters. It could be the case that he assumed that St. Paul was bilingual. If he was familiar with

¹¹ John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986, p. 164. According to Lampe the Roman church was predominantly Greek-speaking throughout the second century (Peter Lampe, 'The Roman Christians of Romans 16,' in Karl P. Donfried [ed], *The Romans Debate*, revised and expanded edition, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991, p. 219). Lampe believes that the evidence for Latin in second century Christianity is uncertain, but that nevertheless there was a Latin speaking Christianity in Rome by then (*Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 117).

¹² Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment*, p. 164.

¹³ Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 117f.

¹⁴ Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 117f.

¹⁵ G. G. Willis, *A History of Early Roman Liturgy to the Death of Pope Gregory the Great*, London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1994, p. 21

¹⁶ See p. 46, with note 71 above.

¹⁷ No letter by St. Paul to the Achaeans is known. See p. 66 with note 172 above.

¹⁸ Corinth in the first century had a Latin-speaking colony.

first century Roman literature he would have known that most, if not all, upper class Romans were bilingual. This information could have been gleaned from any number of imperial authors, including Seneca. Many of these authors had been ‘rediscovered’ in the second half of the fourth century not long before Anonymous wrote his letters.¹⁹ Greek speakers were less likely to be literate in Latin. Depending on the level of his familiarity with Seneca’s works he could have known of Seneca’s preference for using Latin technical terms rather than Greek wherever possible.²⁰

5.3 The Language of Rome’s Christians

Language matters. As long as Christian groups in Rome, and the Latin-speaking west generally, retained Greek as their language of communication they were unlikely to attract converts whose native, or only, tongue was Latin. The majority of the members of senatorial families in the late republic, principate and early empire were bilingual, although perhaps not all were equally fluent in both tongues. Cicero Latinised Greek philosophy for an audience that could have read the original works themselves, although it is probable that not all his peers possessed his facility with Greek. It is also doubtful if many would have invested the time and effort necessary to study the works in their original language. Romans often looked askance at the philosophical gifts of the Greeks.²¹ Seneca, too, was aware that the best way to give Stoicism a broader appeal to his own peers was to naturalise it. The author of the apocryphal letters has his Seneca Romanise both Christianity and St. Paul himself in similar fashion.

The first Christian writings were in Greek. As Christianity spread among Latin speakers there was an obvious need for both translations of existing Greek works and even more importantly Christian literature written in Latin. The number of Christians literate in both languages would have been even smaller than those literate in either one. There is no reason to believe that Hellenised Christian writings were treated differently from earlier Greek legacies. They were translated, imitated and adapted by their Roman heirs.

¹⁹ Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, Oxford, 1968, p. 9 with note 2.

²⁰ See p. 16 with note 69 above.

²¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* VI. 851-853; Suetonius, *Nero* LII.

There were few Christian texts written in Latin in the second and early third centuries.²² The *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, dated to approximately A.D. 180, is the earliest dated document of the Latin Church.²³ It was written not at Rome, but in North Africa.

Christianity had inherited the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, but there is no evidence for Latin translations of Jewish writings, Jewish communities in the west continuing to use Greek.²⁴ Several generations of western Christians were Greek-speaking; their language of normal social intercourse was Greek, although they might have used Latin for some purposes, contact with Roman officialdom, for example. They prayed in Greek, studied scripture in Greek.²⁵ ‘Scripture’ is considered to include not only the Jewish inheritance but also non-Jewish works such as the letters of St. Paul, the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles as well as works such as *The Shepherd of Hermas* that were suitable for Christians to read, if not always accepted as canonical. What was considered suitable varied from community to community, even in the same city. There were opponents of Hippolytus in Rome, for example, who rejected both the Gospel and the *Apocalypse* of John.²⁶

There is no evidence of a Jewish translation into Latin of the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ The miracle tales surrounding the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek would indicate that this was considered to be an unusual, even unique, event unlikely to be undertaken again without a compelling reason. Christians had adopted the Septuagint as Christian scripture.²⁸ Hebrew remained the scriptural tongue of the synagogue.²⁹ This was, perhaps, intended as a deliberate contrast to the practices of Christian groups and helped to increase the growing distance between

²² Christine Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin: Its Origins and Character. Three Lectures*, London: Burns and Oates, 1959, p. 29.

²³ Herbert Musurillo (ed. and trans), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: 1972, p. xxii.

²⁴ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 31.

²⁵ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 30.

²⁶ Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, David Smith and John Austin Baker (trans), A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, vol. III, London: Longman and Todd, 1977, pp. 13, 53.

²⁷ R. W. Barnes, personal communication; James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1991, p. 240; Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 31.

²⁸ Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*, p. 240.

²⁹ *ibid.*

Jew and Christian. “It is very likely that the further translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek by the Jew Aquila in 130 CE was intended as a replacement for the Christianised Septuagint.”³⁰

Greek did not cease to be the preferred language of Roman Christianity until the third century at the earliest.³¹ Then, it is suggested, it was the increasing number and influence of Latin-speaking African immigrants, rather than increasing numbers of native-born Latin speaking converts who were responsible for the change in language.³² Three of the earliest Christians to write in Latin, Tertullian, Minucius Felix and Lactantius, were all of African origin. Cross suggests that Tertullian “created ... the theological vocabulary of the Western Church.”³³ He suggests further that Tertullian appears to have used the Greek Bible, translating into Latin as required.³⁴ Yet Tertullian also used a Latin Bible.³⁵ Did he not have access to a complete Latin text or did he prefer his own translation?

Noy points out the large number of Latin-speaking African immigrants in Rome from the latter half of the second century A.D.³⁶ These people appear to have belonged to all status levels, from slave to senator and of various religious persuasions, including Christian. North Africa was a fertile recruiting ground for Roman military units as well as for charioteers.³⁷ It has been estimated that in the third century as many as one eighth of the membership of the senate was of African origin.³⁸ There is also evidence of wealthy Africans, just below the level of the senatorial elite, who migrated to Rome.³⁹ Of the inscriptions identified by Noy as being ‘African’ the great

³⁰ Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, p. 240.

³¹ Edgar J. Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, revised and enlarged by R. M. Grant, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 144.

³² David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome. Citizens and Strangers*, London: Duckworth, 2000, pp. 170, 186.

³³ F. L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1960, p. 136.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 140.

³⁶ Noy, *Foreigners at Rome*, pp. 252-253.

³⁷ Noy, *Foreigners at Rome*, p. 253.

³⁸ Noy, *Foreigners at Rome*, p. 252.

³⁹ *ibid.*

majority is Latinised, that is, the names are Roman and the language of the inscription is Latin.⁴⁰

Christian literature in Latin begins to appear at the beginning of the third century.⁴¹ Hippolytus, who wrote between A. D. 200 and 235, was the latest Greek writer of the western Church whose works still survive.⁴² He wrote in Greek when he attacked the bishop of Rome and with a Roman audience in mind.⁴³ By the time Bishop Cyprian of Carthage was corresponding with the Christians of Rome in the mid-third century he did so in Latin.

The first notable theologian of western Christianity who wrote in Latin, and from Rome, was the schismatic Novatian.⁴⁴ He might have died in 257 during the Valerian persecutions although there is some doubt about this dating;⁴⁵ it is possible that he survived longer.⁴⁶ Novatian's works indicate that he was trained in Stoic philosophy⁴⁷ and there is evidence that he was familiar with some of Seneca's letters.⁴⁸

The first to attempt Biblical exegesis in Latin was Victorinus, Bishop of Poetovio, who died during the persecution in 304.⁴⁹ Little of his work has survived.⁵⁰

It is useful to provide a brief overview of the change from Greek to Latin as the language of Roman Christianity. The author of the correspondence is anxious to portray Paul as a Latin speaker. More than that, while acknowledging his irregular education, he has 'Seneca' propose to make good this shortfall so that the Christian apostle can take his rightful place (rightful in the

⁴⁰ Noy, *Foreigners at Rome*, pp. 6-7; 289-290; 310-311. Noy notes that of a total of 75 African inscriptions (pp. 289-290; 310-311) only four use Greek (*CIL* VI. 297, 332-333, *JJWE* ii. 508).

⁴¹ Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, p. 42.

⁴² Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, p. 144. There is scholarly debate on Hippolytus. Opinions differ about the works attributed to him. It is even unclear whether there was more than one author of that name.

⁴³ T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian. A Historical and Literary Study*, Oxford, 1971, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, p. 180.

⁴⁵ Socrates, *Church History* iv. 28.

⁴⁶ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, p. 179.

⁴⁷ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, p. 181.

⁴⁸ Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 183.

⁴⁹ Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 187.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

view of the letter writer) as a member of Rome's elite orders, with the education to be expected, and essential, to anyone of this status.

There is no evidence to indicate how familiar Anonymous was with Christian works written in Greek, either in the original language or in Latin translation. Any conclusions are tentative and circumstantial. Given the decline in the knowledge of Greek in the west it is more than likely that our author had little or no Greek. At least some of these works had been translated into Latin, some comparatively early. It is difficult to believe, for example, that he would have been ignorant of the *Shepherd*, given that work's long-standing popularity and the fact that it had been translated into Latin comparatively early, perhaps as early as the second century.⁵¹

The following sections, then, provide evidence for the gradual replacement of Greek by Latin as the language of Roman Christianity. Each section discusses a specific piece of Christian literature. Interest lies in when and where it was produced, its original language, whether Greek or Latin, and, if Greek, when it was translated into Latin. Another concern is an attempt to understand what the document has to tell us of the Christian community that produced it as well as the group to which it was directed.

5. 4 *First Clement*

At the time *I Clement* was written the Christian community of Rome was still Greek-speaking.⁵² Its ethnic make-up appears by this time to have become predominantly gentile rather than Jewish,⁵³ although the influence of Jewish tradition was still strong. *I Clement* claims to be the work of a community rather than that of a particular individual. Tradition assigns it to Clement, bishop of Rome at the end of the first century,⁵⁴ who, despite his Roman name, writes in Greek.⁵⁵

⁵¹ See section 5 below, with note 72.

⁵² Chrys C. Caragounis, 'From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church between Romans and *I Clement*,' in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (edd), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans. 1998, p. 271, with note 120.

⁵³ Caragounis, 'From Obscurity to Prominence,' p. 271.

⁵⁴ Kleist suggests A. D. 92-101 (James A. Kleist, *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch*, Ancient Christian Writers. The Works of the Fathers in Translation, no. 1, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961, p. 3); Jeffers prefers. A. D 92-97 (James S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome. Social Order and Hierarchy in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 90).

Clement approved of Jewish tradition, not merely that of the Old Testament but also that not included in it.⁵⁶ He quotes from extra-biblical Jewish literature as well as the Septuagint.⁵⁷ The Septuagint was still accepted as the word of God.⁵⁸ There is no agreement on Clement's background. At various times it has been suggested that he was Jewish, that he was a Hellenised Jew or that he had been a proselyte attracted first to Judaism who had then converted to Christianity.⁵⁹ The Jewish past is still a living presence in Clement's church.⁶⁰ The author even refers to the custom of sacrificing at the Temple in Jerusalem.⁶¹

Caragounis suggests that the Church of Rome assumed the mantle of leadership following the example of the political sphere. Rome was the capital of empire, therefore the Christians of Rome felt entitled to demand that the Corinthian Christians accept their ruling in a dispute.⁶² Jeffers argues against this view, believing that Clement writes as to an equal.⁶³ It is difficult to believe that the group for whom Clement was spokesman had no feeling of natural superiority when they were writing from the imperial capital.

There are hints in *I Clement* that the author's community in Rome has problems of its own. The author confesses that it faces the same conflict and it too needs to be reminded of tradition.⁶⁴ His opponents are the "double-minded" and those who question the power of God; they can expect exemplary condemnation and punishment.⁶⁵ One cannot escape the suspicion that by the "power of God" Clement really means episcopal power. Despite his extolling of humility and modesty,⁶⁶ it is clear that to Clement these virtues are to be displayed by ordinary Christians rather than by

⁵⁵ See Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 172f for a discussion on the identity of Clement.

⁵⁶ Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 59.

⁵⁷ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, pp. 33, 143.

⁵⁸ Caragounis, 'From Obscurity to Prominence' pp. 277-278.

⁵⁹ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 34.

⁶⁰ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 169.

⁶¹ *I Clement* 41. 2.

⁶² Caragounis, 'From Obscurity to Prominence,' pp. 275-276.

⁶³ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ *I Clement* 7. 1-2.

⁶⁵ *I Clement* 11. 2.

⁶⁶ e.g. *I Clement* 2. 1, 19. 1, 30. 2.

their divinely appointed leaders.⁶⁷ Jeffers suggests that the “double-minded” includes disaffected Jewish converts returning to Judaism.⁶⁸ Many Jewish Christians were unhappy with the concept of a monarchical episcopate, preferring the synagogue custom of governance by elders. I shall return to this problem of church governance.

5.5 *Shepherd of Hermas*

The *Shepherd of Hermas* provides an insight into the social status of Christians in late first century to early second century Rome. It also contributes to an understanding of some of the problems faced by the contemporary Christian community, or at least those that were identified by Hermas. The work’s popularity over a long time span indicates that at least some of these topics continued to be a cause of disquiet to the Christian community of later periods. One such problem is that of wealth, a problem still being addressed by St. Augustine.

It is possible that the *Shepherd* was composed as early as 90-135.⁶⁹ Jeffers concludes that it dates from the middle of the second century “at latest.”⁷⁰ Its author (or perhaps one of them)⁷¹ might have been a contemporary of the writer of *I Clement*. Like *I Clement*, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is written in Greek. Unlike *I Clement* it makes no pretence to literary style. It is written in the language of the people.⁷² Hermas was an ‘ordinary’ Christian in second century Rome. He did not belong to either of the elite orders whose members have left most of the literary information about their time and place. He was literate, but it was the ‘practical literacy’ extolled by Trimalchio’s guest rather than the literary/rhetorical education to be expected in a member of the

⁶⁷ *I Clement* 43. 1, 60. 4, 61.

⁶⁸ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 173.

⁶⁹ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome* p. 21.

⁷⁰ Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 111. Lampe dates the work to 120-140 (*Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 188, n. 218).

⁷¹ For discussion of possible multiple authorship, see Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 8f, *Rich and Poor in the Shepherd of Hermas*, p.6f. Lampe rejects multiple authorship (*Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 197, note 243).

⁷² Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 22. There might have been a Latin version of the text in the second century (Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome*, p. 106). See also Charles Thomas Cruttwell, *A Literary History of Early Christianity, including the Fathers and the Chief Heretical Writers of the Ante-Nicene Period*, vol. I, New York: AMS, 1971, p.111 and Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 118.

ruling elite.⁷³ He was not ‘ordinary’, or typical, in that he was capable of composing such a work. The fictitious correspondence between Paul and Seneca also preserves the voice of an ordinary Christian of a later century. Its author is one who admires the high literary culture and would have St. Paul be seen to acquire it.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* was held in such esteem that some Christians regarded it as worthy of inclusion in the canon.⁷⁴ For the first five centuries it was probably the most widely read non-canonical Christian document.⁷⁵

Hermas complains that some wealthy members of his community do not always behave with proper Christian charity towards their poorer brethren. It is a complaint not confined to Christians. Seneca too was reproached for his immense wealth that appeared to be at odds with his paean to poverty.⁷⁶ His reply to the critics foreshadows Hermas: *Donabit (sc. opes).⁷⁷ Domus ipsa diuitis uiri quantam habet bene faciendi materiam!*⁷⁸ Hermas’ vision commands the wealthy to succour widows and orphans.⁷⁹ The poor repay the material assistance of the rich by their prayers.⁸⁰ Seneca’s view is that such assistance is the due of those in need and the duty of those who can provide, by virtue of their common humanity, and that the giver must expect no return.⁸¹ The evidence does not permit the conclusion that the author of the *Shepherd* was aware of Seneca’s ideas. The coincidence is, however, striking. Any Christian familiar with Hermas’ recommendations on the proper use of wealth could not help but be impressed by the philosopher’s apparently Christian opinion on the topic. The reverse also applies; those aware of

⁷³ *nam litteris satis inquinatus est.... destinaui illum artificium docere, aut tonstrinum aut praeconem aut certe causidicum...* (Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* XLVI.7).

⁷⁴ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 10.

⁷⁵ Christine Trevett, ‘“I Have Heard from Some Teachers”: The Second-Century Struggle for Forgiveness and Reconciliation,’ in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (edd), *Retribution, Repentance, and Reconciliation*, papers read at the 2002 summer meeting and the 2003 winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, *Studies in Church History* 40, Woodbridge, Suffolk: Ecclesiastical History Society, 2004, p. 10.

⁷⁶ See pp. 101-102 above.

⁷⁷ Seneca, *De uita beata* xxiii. 5.

⁷⁸ Seneca, *De uita beata* xxiv. 2-3.

⁷⁹ *Hermas, Sim.* 1. 8f; Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 160.

⁸⁰ *Hermas, Sim.* 2. 5f; Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 163f.

⁸¹ See Chapter 3. 2 above.

Seneca's advice on how the wealthy should aid the poor, would feel that they were on familiar territory with the *Shepherd*. Given the popularity of this work over such a long period of time it is difficult to believe that the author of the correspondence between 'Seneca' and 'St. Paul' was unaware of it, especially as it was translated into Latin at a comparatively early date.⁸²

5. 6 *The Muratorian Fragment*

The Muratorian Fragment is traditionally dated to the end of the second century A.D.,⁸³ its place of origin Christian circles in Rome itself, or a church associated with Rome.⁸⁴ This dating as well as the place of origin of the Fragment, and the language in which it was composed, have all been challenged. Hahneman believes that it is a work originating in the Greek east of the fourth century.⁸⁵

The *Fragment*, as we have it, is written in Latin. It is not, however, the Latin of the second century, but rather of the third or fourth century, even as late as the beginning of the fifth century.⁸⁶ To complicate the picture still further the Latin is very poor, perhaps because of scribal carelessness and/or ignorance.⁸⁷ It has been suggested that the work of which the *Fragment* is a part was not written originally in Latin, but is a translation from Greek.⁸⁸

A few excerpts from the *Fragment* have also survived in a Prologue to the letters of St. Paul.⁸⁹ The Latin in these extracts (they consist of only 24 lines, or parts of lines) is better than the language of the *Fragment*, suggesting that they come from a different source.⁹⁰ The examples of third and fourth century spellings identified in lines from the *Fragment* are not present in those

⁸² See note 72 on p. 195 above.

⁸³ Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, David Smith and John Austin Baker (trans), A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, vol. III, London: Longman and Todd, 1977, p. 13; Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 27f.

⁸⁴ Daniélou, *Origins of Latin Christianity*, p. 13; Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 22f.

⁸⁵ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 214; see chapters 2 to 5 of *Muratorian Fragment* for an extensive discussion of this point.

⁸⁶ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, pp. 12-17, 32.

⁸⁷ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, pp. 13-17, 32.

⁸⁹ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 9.

⁹⁰ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 10.

same lines that are also preserved in the excerpts.⁹¹ With so little material from the extracts it would be unwise to labour this point.

If the traditional view is accepted it demonstrates that a Latin translation of this document was not thought necessary until the third century, despite its obvious importance in setting out works that, in the view of its author, formed part of the Christian canon, and in spite of its Roman provenance. If Hahneman's suggestion of a fourth century date and eastern origin is correct, however, then the *Fragment* can offer no assistance in charting the changing language of Rome's Christians. Scholarly opinion on the problem is divided.⁹²

5. 7 Inscriptions and the Pictorial Tradition

Christian burial practices provide additional evidence for both the status and the language of the early Christian community in Rome. They give the impression of a small, and/or generally poor, Christian population that speaks Greek, for two or even three hundred years.⁹³ Then evidence begins to appear of increasing numbers of individuals who are sufficiently well off to be able to afford a monument; Latin gradually replaces Greek. A Greek epitaph commemorates every pope, except Cornelius, from A.D. 222 to 296.⁹⁴ Later popes are recorded in Latin.⁹⁵ From the fourth century on the majority of Christian inscriptions in Rome are in Latin.⁹⁶

The Jewish catacombs in Rome contain no representations of the human form or of narrative

⁹¹ Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, pp. 11-12.

⁹² G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, book review by Everett Ferguson, *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993), pp. 691-697; G. M. Hahnemann, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, book review by J. K. Elliott, *Novum Testamentum* 36. 3 (Jul. 1994), pp. 297-299; G. M. Hahnemann, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, book review by Robert M. Grant, *Church History* 64:4 (Dec. 1995), pp. 638-639.

⁹³ This impression is challenged by an early second century dating of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, with its evidence of a number of reasonably well-to-do Christians.

⁹⁴ Noy, *Foreigners at Rome*, p.173.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Leonard Victor Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome, In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, Leeuven: Peeters, 2000, p. 153.

images.⁹⁷ Rome's first Christians inherited this reluctance to employ iconography depicting animals or the human form. The Second Temple period was rigidly aniconic,⁹⁸ at least officially. Attitudes were more relaxed in the rabbinic period and representational art is found in synagogues dating from early in this period.⁹⁹ Gradually Christians adopted pagan methods to picture ancient Jewish stories as well as their own more recent ones. The splendid sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus, who died in A.D. 359, has scenes from both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰⁰ This sarcophagus unites three traditions. A pagan coffin was frequently decorated with scenes from its occupant's life. The last resting place of Iunius Bassus relives not his own life, but that of his saviour, including scenes from the Old Testament thought to foretell events recorded in the New Testament.

In the third century a human figure begins to be used to represent Jesus.¹⁰¹ A statue from the Roman catacombs depicts Jesus as a young, beardless man carrying a lamb on his shoulders.¹⁰² In pose and dress the figure resembles earlier depictions of Apollo.¹⁰³ It is not surprising that early representations of Jesus took their inspiration from pagan models. Christians in Rome, as elsewhere in the empire, spent their lives surrounded by images in public places. These images represented scenes and figures, actual and mythical, from Rome's past. Jewish tradition was and is hostile to the pictorial representation of humans and animals and there was no portrait of Jesus. There was not even a physical description. It is no wonder, then, that Christian artists or their patrons drew inspiration from the familiar images that surrounded them. It must have seemed

⁹⁷ Robin M. Jensen. 'The Dura Europos Synagogue. Early-Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos,' in Steven Fine (ed), *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue. Cultural Interactions During the Greco-Roman Period*, Baltimore Studies in the History of Judaism, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 176.

⁹⁸ Joseph M. Baumgarten, 'Art in the Synagogue. Some Talmudic Views,' in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, p. 73.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, p. 114.

¹⁰¹ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, p. 90.

¹⁰² Mary Barnett, *Gods and Myths of the Romans*, photography by Michael Dixon, Hoo: Grange Books, 1999, p. 102.

¹⁰³ Barnett, *Gods and Myths of the Romans*, p. 103. Or Orpheus, perhaps even Hermes (Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 8).

natural to depict the good shepherd in similar fashion to a pagan predecessor.¹⁰⁴

It has been suggested that early depictions of the shepherd figure in Christian iconography represent Hermas' shepherd rather than Apollo.¹⁰⁵ Osiek points out that such pictorial reference to Hermas could have provided a comfortable transition from Apollo to Jesus.¹⁰⁶ The figure appears early and often in Christian art in both meeting places and burial sites and predates the cross as a symbol of Christianity.¹⁰⁷ Ordinary members of Rome's early Christian groups felt free to combine Greek and Jewish traditions and decorative motifs.¹⁰⁸ In this they were following a long-standing Roman practice of assimilating foreign beliefs of all kinds. Such beliefs were often altered in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways as they were naturalised.

The evidence from all these sources indicates that the change from Greek to Latin was a gradual one. It was probably complete by the time the apocryphal correspondence was written, but the Greek past was not far distant. If the author wanted to Romanise St. Paul he had to show him corresponding in Latin with Seneca, in spite of the fact that the historical Seneca could equally well have used Greek. Seneca had been at the centre of power. His supposed friendship with St. Paul and admiration for his teachings could help to convince aristocratic traditionalists that Christianity was in fact a long-established Roman tradition. This would counter the appeal the Emperor Julian had made to ancient custom and that some contemporary aristocrats continued to invoke. The issue of converting the aristocracy and the challenge to Christian expansion posed by the Emperor Julian are addressed in Chapter Six.

The desire of the correspondence to separate St. Paul from his Greek-speaking past and to depict him as a Roman who speaks and writes in Latin is straightforward, as is its representation of 'Seneca' proposing to make good the shortcomings in the apostle's irregular (by the standards of

¹⁰⁴ "Vom >christlichen Volk< wurde Paganen mit Christlichem ohne grosses Problembewusstsein vermischt" (Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 298).

¹⁰⁵ Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Graydon F. Snyder, 'The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome,' in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁸ Osiek, 'The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome: The Case of Hermas,' in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, p. 171.

the empire's ruling elite) education. The gradual change in the language of western Christianity from (probably) exclusively Greek to Latin as its major tongue is also relatively uncomplicated, if long drawn out. Motives behind these objectives are also readily comprehensible. The intention to demonstrate that Paul had abandoned Judaism for Christianity is more ambivalent. An assessment of the tangled relationship of Judaism and Christianity in the fourth century may help in understanding the unknown author's point of view. A brief review of the history of the development of that relationship will help in that understanding.

5. 8 Neither Greek nor Jew

A theme in the apocryphal correspondence is the question of Paul's Jewish inheritance. The topic is treated inconsistently. Barlow explains various inconsistencies in the letters by suggesting the possibility of multiple authors, although he believes that all the letters were composed at the same time.¹⁰⁹ Consistency, however, is not necessarily to be expected in such a work. The *Historia Augusta*, also a product of the late fourth century, although a very much larger and far more sophisticated work, is also inconsistent.¹¹⁰ In this instance Syme has argued for a single author rather than multiple "imposters."¹¹¹ A similar argument can be applied to the authorship of the correspondence. More than one author is possible, but not essential.

In *Ep. V* the author states clearly that Paul is no longer a Jew, but has converted to Christianity. This letter marks the first mention of the subject.¹¹² Its claim of conversion is unambiguous.

The topic recurs in *Ep. XI*. In this letter the author's S sympathises with P on the unjust punishment of *innocentia uestra*, apparently referring to Christians. The sudden appearance of *Iudaei* some ten lines later (in Barlow's text) is unexpected and startling. Its coupling with *Christiani* is equally surprising in this context. No other surviving account mentions that Jews were condemned as arsonists along with Christians. The correspondence, then, is in two minds. On the one hand *Ep. V* claims that Paul has abandoned Judaism and converted to Christianity.

¹⁰⁹ Barlow, *Epistolae*, p. 92; Chapter 1.12: commentary to *Ep. XI*.

¹¹⁰ Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, pp. 1, 134.

¹¹¹ Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, p. 176f, esp. p.180.

¹¹² See p. 64 above.

On the other hand, Judaism and Christianity are linked to the extent that Nero persecutes innocent Jews and Christians alike, blaming both groups for the fire that ravaged Rome. It is not clear whether there are two authors with divergent views, or whether one author is undecided. It is also unclear whether the intention of the author of *Ep. XI* is to inject historical realism into his work. That is to say, he might have been linking Judaism and Christianity in this way because he was aware that in the first century the boundary was ill-defined. The correspondence demonstrates that its author had some knowledge of conditions in Nero's Rome. He has a good deal of information about the fire, although the accuracy of some of that information may be questioned. I shall deal first with the subject of *Ep. XI*, the fire in Neronian Rome, leaving aside for the moment the vexed and complex questions about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity raised by *Ep. V*.

Ep. XI refers to the fire of Rome in Nero's time and the subsequent persecution of Christians whom the emperor accused of responsibility for starting the fire. The following section of this chapter discusses the available information on the fire and its immediate aftermath and what various scholars have deduced from that evidence. It also addresses the question of whether the letter writer's claim could be correct. Is it possible, on the evidence available, to decide whether Jews too had been condemned, and punished, for arson? The question bears on the reliability of our author's information. His portrayal of the friendship between St. Paul and Seneca is fictitious, but is it possible that the background he supplies to bolster his fiction can reveal some reliable information about his own time and perhaps even first century Rome? Such information could, for example, include the recognition in the late fourth century that Roman authority in the first century would not have been able to differentiate Jew from Christian. It might even include an acknowledgement that such confusion was understandable. The following section discusses an aspect of the persecution of Christians after the fire.

5. 9 *Ep. XI* and the Great Fire of Rome

Fox argues that Paul was tried, condemned and executed in Rome shortly before the fire of 64.¹¹³ The trial introduced Nero and his advisers to Christianity and demonstrated that it was a separate

¹¹³ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Hammondsworth: Viking, 1986, p. 432.

entity from Judaism.¹¹⁴ This in turn led to the Christians being seen as the perfect targets to be accused of arson after the fire.¹¹⁵ There is, however, some evidence, questionable perhaps, from the fictional correspondence between ‘St. Paul’ and ‘Seneca’ that in fact Jews suffered along with Christians in the aftermath of the fire.¹¹⁶ This same source has Paul alive just after the fire.¹¹⁷ St. Jerome dates Paul’s martyrdom to two years after the death of Seneca.¹¹⁸ This dating places the apostle’s death in 67 or 68.¹¹⁹

There is insufficient evidence to indicate that Paul was ever brought to trial. Nor does Tacitus’ account of the sufferings of the Christians after the fire of Rome in 64 demonstrate that even by his day Christians were familiar to his class. If they had been he would not have felt it necessary to explain who they were. It is possible that he himself had had some contact with Christians. Tacitus had been proconsul of Asia c. 112-113,¹²⁰ and might have encountered Christians in his province.

The younger Pliny’s experience in Bithynia is relevant here. It appears that Pliny at first knew little or nothing about Christians, except that they belonged to a suspect group. All the information he sends to the emperor is the result of his own enquiries. Pliny asked for Trajan’s advice on how to deal with the Christians in his province after he had investigated the charges levelled against them. Pliny, a conscientious governor, was prepared to check whether those reported to him really were Christians or the victims of false accusations. He found some informers who reported to the authorities people against whom they bore personal enmity.

It is doubtful whether any investigation would have been held in Nero’s Rome when the emperor required enough scapegoats to provide a suitable spectacle and in order to allay any suspicion of his own responsibility for the crime. He also needed them speedily. The searchers after

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 1. 13 (commentary on *Ep.* XI).

¹¹⁷ Barlow, *Epistolae*, *Ep.* XI. See also Appendix II for a summary of the range of dates suggested for St. Paul’s death.

¹¹⁸ St. Jerome, *De viris illustribus* XII (*P.L.* XXIII, p. 629); see pp. 18-19 above.

¹¹⁹ See Appendix II.

¹²⁰ Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, vol. I, Oxford, 1958, p. 72.

Christians probably took any and all accused: *igitur primum correpti qui fatebantur, deinde eorum indicio multitudo ingens.*¹²¹ There is no hint that Roman citizens were included.¹²² It is difficult to justify an argument from silence. It is, however, equally difficult to believe that Tacitus would have ignored any hint in his sources that citizens had been so summarily treated. This indicates that there was some kind of sorting process, no matter how superficial. It is possible that a few citizens might have been caught up but it is unlikely that there were many and also unlikely that they themselves possessed any standing or could rely on a patron who did. There were enough poor non-citizens to choose. Even so the spectacle did not have the desired effect. Many people, already traumatised by the loss of life, possessions and shelter, were further unsettled by the executions and were convinced that the emperor was trying to cover up his own guilt.

It is surprising to find that Christianity had come to the attention of the authorities as early as Tacitus' account of the fire would indicate. Perhaps this was due to its origin in Judaism, a recognised ethnically based religious group that attracted both positive and negative interest in the Graeco-Roman world. In the climate of fear and hysteria during and immediately after the fire there was probably popular support for the authorities in the seeking out and punishment of any suspected arsonists. Outsiders are always liable to be condemned in times of crisis.

Christians in Rome were outsiders on several levels. They were at this time mostly foreigners. Even in cosmopolitan Rome of the first century A.D. foreigners were often looked at askance by Roman neighbours. Because of their religious beliefs Christians did not attend the usual festivals. They appeared to have some connection with the Jews, a notoriously anti-social people.¹²³ Such matters are unlikely to have gone unnoticed in the crowded conditions where most Christians, and most Romans, lived. Did Christians talk to their neighbours about the imminent end of the world when only the followers of their 'Christ' would be saved? Such conversations would be remembered and repeated to any official inquisitor or, more likely, reported to the appropriate authority in the same fashion as the Bithynians denounced Christians to Pliny.

¹²¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44.

¹²² Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², p. 66.

¹²³ Juvenal, *Satires* XIV. 100-104; Tacitus, *Histories* V. 5.

There is much that Tacitus' account leaves out that we would like to know. How did the Christians come to official attention? It is possible that there were in Nero's administration officials from his predecessor's time who remembered the trouble stirred up by the followers of 'Chrestus.'¹²⁴ Such people were obvious targets, troublemakers who were offensive to the Jewish community as well as the general population. There were comparatively few of them so their condemnation and punishment would not lead to a bloodbath that could unsettle the populace and backfire on the emperor. Nero would not have wanted a repeat of the riots that attended the execution of the slaves of the murdered Lucius Pedanius Secundus.¹²⁵ He was not entirely successful. There was no unrest, certainly, but many believed that innocent people were butchered in an attempt to deflect suspicion from Nero himself.

Tacitus reports that *multitudo ingens* was condemned.¹²⁶ Three methods of execution are specified: some were torn apart by dogs, some crucified and others burnt.¹²⁷ This implies a number in the tens, if not dozens. Five to ten individuals must have been required for each method of execution to make the spectacle required. Hopkins believes that Pliny's *multi*, with reference to those in danger of punishment as Christians, should be understood as "dozens" rather than "hundreds."¹²⁸ *Multitudo ingens* gives the impression of denoting more than *multi*, but due allowance must be made for rhetorical exaggeration. Furneaux suggests that *multitudo ingens* here is equivalent to *immensa strages* in *Annals* VI. 19, where the deaths of twenty people each day are indicated.¹²⁹ We can, then, imagine scores of victims; between one hundred and two hundred people should have provided a sufficient spectacle. On Stark's figures that number would represent 5% to 10% of the Christian population of the entire empire.¹³⁰ This is a percentage that must give us pause, until we recall that such figures are necessarily unreliable. It is not necessary to suppose that the Christian population of Rome was wiped out. It is more

¹²⁴ Suetonius, *Claudius* XXV.

¹²⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 45.

¹²⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44.

¹²⁷ ... *laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus adfixi aut flammandi...* (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44).

¹²⁸ Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi; Hopkins, 'Christian Number and its Implications,' p 190.

¹²⁹ Henry Furneaux (ed), *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. II, books XI-XVI, second edition revised by H. F. Pelham and C. D. Fisher, Oxford, 1907, p. 375 and vol. I, books I-VI, second edition, Oxford, 1896, p. 619.

¹³⁰ Todd E. Klutz, 'The Rhetoric of Science,' in *The Rise of Christianity: A Response to Rodney Stark's Sociological Account of Christianization*, *J ECS* 6 (1998), pp. 171-172.

likely that non-Christians were included in what, under the circumstances, must have been a hurried and haphazard operation. It is possible that not all of those executed as Christians and arsonists were Christian, let alone arsonists. The author of Ep. XI in the fictitious correspondence claims that Jews too were caught up in the persecution. It is also possible that some pagans were arrested as well, especially if they demonstrated suspect customs.

Despite the fact that the Christians were obviously guilty of *something*, whether *crimen incendii*, *odium humani generis*,¹³¹ or *pertinacia ac inflexibilis obstinatio*,¹³² for which they deserved to be punished, Nero's motives were suspect. Tacitus reports that the Emperor himself was widely regarded as having been responsible for the fire.¹³³ Tacitus retained an open mind on the subject but is one of the few surviving authors who does.¹³⁴ Pliny the Elder, Suetonius and Cassius Dio are uncompromising in their conviction about Nero's guilt.¹³⁵ Pliny's comment can safely be dated to within a decade of Nero's death, as he himself died in A.D. 79.¹³⁶ He therefore records contemporary opinion, even if it is only his own.

Were some Christians denounced by Jews in similar fashion to the Jewish authorities who denounced Paul to Gallio?¹³⁷ In the climate of the time it is unlikely that such accusations were treated in the same fashion that Gallio had treated the Jewish leaders in Corinth. It is equally unlikely that a careful investigation was carried out such as would be done by the younger Pliny in Bithynia. Simon suggests that Jews in the circle of Nero's wife, Poppaea, allowed the regime to distinguish clearly between Jews and Christians and could be accused of bearing some responsibility for the persecution.¹³⁸ The evidence for such Jewish connections is not compelling,

¹³¹ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44

¹³² Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi.

¹³³ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44. 2.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Neronis principis incendia quibus cremavit urbem* (Pliny, *N.H.* XVII. I. 5); Suetonius, *Nero* XXXVIII.1; Cassius Dio LXII. 16.

¹³⁶ Pliny, *Ep.* VI. xx.

¹³⁷ Acts 18. 12, 14.

¹³⁸ Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel, A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, H. McKeating (trans), Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 117.

although the author of the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul hints at it.¹³⁹ It is possible that there were Jewish ‘philosophers’ at court. It was fashionable to have philosophers of various kinds attached to wealthy households. It is difficult to believe that they would have been able to influence Nero, even if they had tried.

The evidence suggests at least the possibility that anyone accused of being Christian was rounded up: Christian, Jew, even pagans with suspect habits or who were victims of a personal grudge. Public recognition of this possibility would have added to the revulsion against Nero that Tacitus reports, and ensuing sympathy for those perceived as having been unjustly condemned. This is even more likely to happen as the initial panic died down and people turned to the challenge of rebuilding. It is not clear when the spectacle took place, but it was presumably at least some weeks after the fires were finally extinguished.

There is no evidence to support the contention of the apocryphal correspondence that Jews were caught up in the persecution that followed the fire. Equally there is nothing to show that such action was impossible. Nero might have condemned Christians, and only Christians, but it is doubtful if those who did the actual rounding-up could have differentiated between Christian and Jew or were aware that there was a distinction or even cared if there were.

Barlow’s *Ep.* XI deals with a definite event, the large-scale destruction by fire of Nero’s Rome, for which Christians, and perhaps also Jews, were blamed. The correspondence here links St. Paul to both Judaism and Christianity. *Ep.* V, on the other hand, stresses that Paul has abandoned his Jewish inheritance and has converted to Christianity. The two letters, then, present a different picture of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in first century Rome, or, more accurately, what our fourth century author thought that relationship might have been. *Ep.* XI suggests that the Roman authorities could not have differentiated Jew from Christian, with the implication that the differences would not have been obvious. *Ep.* V presents St. Paul as Christian rather than Jew, implying that there had indeed been a difference in the first century, but that the authorities had not attempted to detect it. The following section investigates why, at

¹³⁹ See pp. 63-64 above.

the end of the fourth century, the author of the fictitious correspondence felt that it was necessary to convince his readers that St. Paul had rejected Judaism.

5. 10 Separation of Church and Synagogue

Ep. V fills two purposes: to give Christianity a respectable antiquity and at the same time to demonstrate an early separation from Judaism. The letter's author has no interest in emphasising the antiquity of Judaism and portraying Christianity as its rightful heir, so usurping, as it were, a second-hand antiquity. He is more concerned to supply evidence for Christianity's equality with paganism. Even for the highly conservative and traditionalist aristocracy, three hundred years was a reasonable length of time, especially as many pagan aristocrats were adherents of cults more recently introduced into Rome. The conversion of the aristocracy, a large percentage of whose members were still pagan, is discussed in Chapter Six.

Christianity was not the only monotheistic religion to seek converts. Jewish proselytism was still active. To complicate matters there were Christians, and Jews, who ignored the boundary that both sets of religious leaders wished to draw. In many cases it was not so much wilful ignorance as an honest failure to understand the necessity of a boundary. At the end of the fourth century the division between church and synagogue was still incomplete, although it was well advanced.

The relationship between Christianity and Judaism formed part of the background of the author himself and of his audience. It is difficult to believe that many Christians, or Jews, could have been ignorant of the disputes. For the Jews, there was the legislation restricting proselytism as well as rabbinical opposition to closer ties with Christianity. For Christians there were sermons from their bishops as well as works like Augustine's *Contra Judaeos*.

The law codes indicate continuing Jewish missionary activity well into the fourth century and beyond. Imperial authority viewed Jewish proselytism unsympathetically and enacted legislation designed to put a stop to it. A law of 315 attempted to suppress Jewish missionary activity.¹⁴⁰ In

¹⁴⁰ *Cod Th. XVI. viii. 1.*

383 a further law was enacted forbidding conversion to Judaism.¹⁴¹ There were further measures in 409 and 438, repetition of the law suggesting continued disobedience.

Christian leaders also opposed Jewish proselytism. Judaism vied with Christianity for pagan converts, and with some success. Even more worrying was the fact that there were Christians who were attracted to Judaism. There were also Christians who saw no conflict between being Christian while observing some Jewish traditions. This was still a live issue some ten years after the correspondence was composed and while it was in circulation, as can be seen by the robust exchange of opinion between St. Jerome and St. Augustine on a related matter: should Jews who wished to become Christians be required to cease Jewish observances?¹⁴²

The following discussion addresses these topics. The aim of the discussion is to provide a brief account of the complex history of the gradual separation of Christianity and Judaism up to the end of the fourth century. This is the time when the correspondence was composed and when it was introduced into the wider Christian community. The correspondence indicates its author's knowledge of some part of the history of first century Rome, especially as it touches Christians. He is aware of Christianity's origin in Judaism. It is at least possible that he was also aware of the slow and gradual separation of church and synagogue, still not quite complete in his own day. This knowledge formed part of the background against which he composed his letters. First century writers such as Juvenal enjoyed a renaissance in the fourth century. It is likely that they also were part of his background.

St. Paul insisted that non-Jews attracted to the new Jewish sect did not need to obey Jewish law and that physical circumcision was unnecessary. Paul was able to convince other Jewish followers of Jesus that these exemptions be allowed. This was a momentous decision and was recognised as such. A Jewish sect was permitting entry and full equality to non-Jews without the requirement that they obey Jewish law. Even so its full import for the future was not wholly appreciated.

¹⁴¹ *Cod Th.* XVI. vii. 3.

¹⁴² See pp. 221-223 below.

The dispute between St. Paul on the one side and ‘those of the circumcision’ on the other is important for another reason. It is clear that the new movement was divided very early between believers who followed Jewish tradition and who continued to obey Jewish Law and those who were to be excused such obedience. It is probable that the former group consisted of Jewish and the latter of non-Jewish recruits, who perhaps included God-fearers already attracted to the synagogue.¹⁴³ The situation was further complicated by what seems to have been a wide range of observance on the part of the God-fearers. Some appear to have done little more than keep the Sabbath and abstain from pork, at least as far as one outsider’s unsympathetic observation went.¹⁴⁴ Others adopted the whole of Jewish theology and ethics and observed all Jewish traditions and practices, stopping just short of making the final commitment of conversion.¹⁴⁵ Such people were well-known, even notorious, in Rome itself and the wider Graeco-Roman world. Epictetus is critical of them, not because they adopted a Jewish life style, but because they refused to take the final step necessary for conversion.¹⁴⁶

Hengel suggests that Christianity did not separate from Judaism for almost a century.¹⁴⁷ He believes that the “definitive” break occurred in the first decades of the second century.¹⁴⁸ Christians from non-Jewish backgrounds tried increasingly to emphasise the differences from Judaism, by alterations to the liturgy, for example.¹⁴⁹ For their part, synagogues continued the practice of reading the scriptures in Hebrew, thus marking a distinction from the groups of Christ believers who used the Greek Septuagint.¹⁵⁰ There was a feeling in some Jewish circles that Christians had taken over the Septuagint, leading to a desire for another, and more literal,

¹⁴³ See p. 50, note 96 above for a definition of ‘God-fearer;’ also Lieu, ‘Do God-fearers make Good Christians?’ in Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce and David E. Orton (edd), *Crossing the Boundaries. Essays in Biblical Interpretation in honour of Michael D. Goulder*, Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 8, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, pp. 329-345.

¹⁴⁴ Juvenal, *Satire XIV*. 96.

¹⁴⁵ Lawrence H. Schiffman, ‘At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism,’ in E. P. Sanders, A. I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson (edd). *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. II, *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period*, London: SCM, 1981, p. 138.

¹⁴⁶ Epictetus, *Diss.* 2. 9. 20.

¹⁴⁷ Hengel, ‘Early Christianity as a Jewish Messianic, Universalistic Movement,’ in Donald A. Hagner (ed), *Conflicts and Challenges in Early Christianity*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Hengel, ‘Early Christianity,’ p. 38.

¹⁴⁹ Hengel, ‘Early Christianity,’ p. 35.

¹⁵⁰ Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*, p. 240.

translation of Jewish scripture into Greek.¹⁵¹ This desire for an improved translation was, however, motivated only partially by the Christian appropriation of the Septuagint.¹⁵² Dunn claims that the new translation was part of a campaign to rabbinise Greek-speaking Jews.¹⁵³ Lieu suggests that there are other factors involved in what was an incredibly complex situation.¹⁵⁴ The failure of two rebellions prompted exegesis to re-evaluate messianic expectations.¹⁵⁵ At the same time Jews were seeking Greek translations of scripture that were closer to the Hebrew originals.¹⁵⁶

The division developed over centuries. As Judaism and Christianity slowly diverged the width of the gulf at any given time depended on the perspective of the observer. According to Acts, Paul made the local synagogue his first stop in any city he visited.¹⁵⁷ To him, it would seem, there was as yet little distance.¹⁵⁸ Observant Jews and God-fearers were the most likely to be influenced by the new teaching.¹⁵⁹ Sometimes he was welcomed. The synagogue (or perhaps a synagogue) in Ephesus, for example, was receptive to his message and urged him to return.¹⁶⁰ When he did so, however, the sentiment had apparently changed and he received a mixed reception.¹⁶¹

The Roman attitude towards circumcision was important, especially to Latin-speakers. Romans regarded genital mutilation (circumcision was regarded as mutilation) as shameful and

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Lieu, *Image and Reality, The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, p. 141, with note 117.

¹⁵³ Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*, p. 240.

¹⁵⁴ Lieu, *Image and Reality*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁵ Lieu, *Image and Reality*, p. 141.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Acts 17. 2.

¹⁵⁸ "... Paul did not see the Christ faith... as being in opposition to Judaism. On the contrary, it was the true Judaism" (Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicism in the Apostle Paul,' in *Stoicism*, p. 69).

¹⁵⁹ Pieter W. van der Horst, 'Was the Synagogue a Place of Sabbath Worship Before 70 CE?' in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*. p. 32, note. 72. For further discussion see J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias, Greek Inscriptions with Commentary*, texts from the excavations at Aphrodisias conducted by Kenan T. Erim, supplementary volume no. 12, Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987, pp. 48ff, 59-65 and note 112.

¹⁶⁰ Acts 18. 20.

¹⁶¹ Acts 19. 8, 9.

degrading.¹⁶² They linked, and perhaps confused, circumcision with castration.¹⁶³ All these factors no doubt added to the attractions of Christianity for Jews already concerned about the problems and disadvantages they faced in Graeco-Roman culture. That attraction would have been especially strong after the string of disasters that included the destruction of the Temple and ended with the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem itself. It took time for the rabbinate to establish itself and provide another focus of authority. As the influence of the rabbis increased they proved themselves to be as anxious as Christian authority to fix and defend a boundary between the faiths.

Boyarin relates a story that demonstrates a rabbinical determination to delineate Judaism from Christianity that was as powerful as that of an Ignatius or a Chrysostom to separate Christianity from Judaism.¹⁶⁴ Motives appear to have been similar: to buttress rabbinic authority and to discourage Jews who were attracted to Christian teaching.

As long as Christianity continued to be perceived as a sect of Judaism Jews joining a Christian community would have felt that they were not abandoning their ancestral faith. No ‘conversion’ was involved.¹⁶⁵ St. Paul, after all, had not felt it necessary to repudiate Jewish law. He was a Hellenised Jew who “never steps out of Jewish categories.”¹⁶⁶ Nor did he forbid his followers to attend Jewish meals.¹⁶⁷ He cautioned only against dealing with pagans and their sacrificial meals.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 104.

¹⁶³ *Digest* 48. 8. 11 (Modestinus); Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 104, note 27.

¹⁶⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God. Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 34-36.

¹⁶⁵ Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children. Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 104-105. But note that Segal concludes that, according to the modern sociological definition, Paul in fact was a convert (*Rebecca's Children*, p. 103). See also Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity. A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 55f.

¹⁶⁶ Simon, *Verus Israel*, pp. 23f, 27.

¹⁶⁷ Hengel, ‘Early Christianity,’ p. 31.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

One hundred years after the lifetime of St. Paul the debate raged on.¹⁶⁹ St Justin Martyr declared that Law-obeying Jews who professed Jesus as the Christ would be saved unless they tried to convince Gentile Christians that following Mosaic Law was essential for salvation.¹⁷⁰ Justin believed that such Jewish Christians suffered from “an instability of will,” but he did not agree with those Christians who refused to associate with them. He believed that non-Jews who had been persuaded to observe Jewish law but who at the same time professed faith in Christ would “probably” be saved.¹⁷¹ Those, however, who have once acknowledged Jesus as Christ, then turned to Mosaic Law and denied Jesus, cannot be saved except by repentance.¹⁷² Similarly, those Jews who continue to obey Jewish law and refuse to believe in Christ will not be saved, especially those who curse Christians in the synagogue.¹⁷³ The relationship between Judaism and Christianity was still complex.¹⁷⁴ It is not surprising that outsiders like members of the Roman elite orders were unsure of the distinction.

Tertullian describes a debate between a Jewish proselyte and a Christian.¹⁷⁵ The man was not of Jewish descent.¹⁷⁶ It is portrayed as a lively and noisy public debate.¹⁷⁷ Tertullian feels that it is necessary to refute Jewish claims, regardless of whether his treatise is aimed at Jews,¹⁷⁸ at Christians, or at both. Some scholars, like Simon, for example, have argued that Tertullian feared that Christianity was threatened by Jewish success in attracting converts.¹⁷⁹ There were obviously still Jewish Christians.¹⁸⁰ It is unclear whether they were recent converts or those who had retained a Jewish identity over the generations, or perhaps a mixture of both.

¹⁶⁹ Lieu, *Image and Reality*, pp. 103, 111.

¹⁷⁰ St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 47.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Osiek, *Rich and Poor*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁵ Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 1. 1. It does not matter whether this encounter is fictional either in part or in whole. The important point is that it was considered credible that such a debate had taken place.

¹⁷⁶ Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 1. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 1. 1.

¹⁷⁸ As it is in *Against the Jews* 3. 1, for example.

¹⁷⁹ Geoffrey D. Dunn (ed), *Tertullian, The Early Church Fathers*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 50-51.

¹⁸⁰ Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 9. 3.

St. Jerome mentions one Dominus (or Domnus),¹⁸¹ *qui persecutionis tempore ad Iudeos declinauerat.*¹⁸² Unfortunately Jerome reveals nothing more about this man. He does not disclose, for example, whether Dominus was a Jewish Christian. It would be interesting to know if Dominus was a Jew who returned to the synagogue in a time of trouble for Christians. Was he a Gentile convert to Christianity who found Judaism more attractive, or is Jerome's implied criticism correct: did Dominus turn to Judaism solely because Christians were under threat and Jews were not? It is clear that some who were attracted at first to the synagogue came to find Christianity better filled their needs. The possibility of a reverse flow should be considered.¹⁸³ Did some pagans convert to Christianity only to discover that Judaism offered them whatever it was that they were seeking? It is unlikely that Dominus rejected Christianity for Judaism only because of the danger involved in remaining Christian. If he had been a pagan convert it would have been simpler for him to return to his former allegiance. This story illustrates the point that as far as the pagan authorities were concerned, returning to Judaism, a recognised religious system, was as acceptable as offering pagan sacrifice. A pagan converting was more problematic, at least for one of high status.¹⁸⁴

Commodian, writing from North Africa in the second half of the third century or at some time in the fourth, or perhaps even as late as the last decades of the fifth century,¹⁸⁵ is critical of those who attend synagogue and seek out the Pharisees.¹⁸⁶ He seems here to be continuing his abuse of pagans, who refuse to see Commodian's Christian truth but continue in their worship of false gods, or who are attracted to Judaism. Commodian apparently fears Jewish competition for pagan converts. Even worse there were Christians who wished to have, or continued to have, contact with Judaism. Or Commodian feared that this was the case. According to Commodian there were fanatics who Judaised.¹⁸⁷ This does not sound like an acceptance of help from the

¹⁸¹ Eusebius, *H. E.* 6. 12. 1.

¹⁸² St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XLI (*P.L.* XXIII, p. 657).

¹⁸³ In the second century St. Justin Martyr complained of those who abandoned Christianity for the synagogue (*Dial.* 47. 4).

¹⁸⁴ See Dio, LXVII. 14, for example.

¹⁸⁵ His date is uncertain (Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 187-188).

¹⁸⁶ Commodian, *Instructions* xxiv.

¹⁸⁷ Commodian, *Instructions* xxxvii.

Jews in time of trouble for Christians; these Christians are accused of approaching the synagogue. It is probable that these people could see no conflict in attending both church and synagogue. They could be either ethnic Jews who had joined the Jesus movement and saw no reason not to continue Jewish observances or non-Jews who had joined a Christian group but were still attracted to the synagogue, or a mixture of both.

Commodian abuses the Jews for their faults, stressing his belief that God has abandoned them in favour of the Christians because the Jews had rejected him.¹⁸⁸ But he also reproves Christians for their fratricidal hatreds.¹⁸⁹ It sounds as if there was strife in Commodian's community and it could be that some members of the congregation were sufficiently disenchanted by Christianity to see what the synagogue had to offer. This is particularly likely if there were bitter disagreements within the Christian community.¹⁹⁰ Commodian also criticises apostates.¹⁹¹ These people appear to have been pagan converts who reverted to paganism under pressure of threatened persecution.

Christian leaders convinced of the truth of the Christian revelation were naturally concerned by any desertion from their flock. Apostates were placing in danger their immortal souls. There was also a less selfless reason for stemming desertions, especially to Judaism. Jewish leaders must not be regarded as an alternative source of authority. To do so obviously decreased the standing of Christian leadership and continued to blur the boundary between Jew and Christian that they were attempting to define. This could be a motive (even if a minor one) for Augustine's criticism of Jerome's decision to translate the Bible from Hebrew into Latin, rather than to base his translation on the Greek Septuagint. Jerome was demonstrating Christianity's dependence on Jewish scholarship. Some Christians who questioned Jerome's version were prepared to accept the ruling of the synagogue on the accuracy of his translation.¹⁹² This presented an obvious

¹⁸⁸ Commodian, *Instructions* xxxviii.

¹⁸⁹ Commodian, *Instructions* xlvi.

¹⁹⁰ Antioch was another city in which the Christian community was deeply divided (into at least three major factions) and in which "Judaisers" were active (Wolfram Kinzig, "'Non-Separation': Closeness and Co-operation Between Jews and Christians in the Fourth Century,' *V. C.* 45 [1991] p. 36).

¹⁹¹ Commodian, *Instructions* i.

¹⁹² See pp. 224-225 below.

challenge to the authority of Christian leadership. St. Augustine's *Aduersus Iudaeos* indicates that there were sufficient numbers of Christians attracted by Judaism to be of concern to Christian authorities. The tractate is addressed to Christians. Its purpose is to arm them against expected attacks on their beliefs by Jews. Augustine imagines a dialogue: Jews reproaching Christians for taking over their ancient scriptures while refusing to follow their precepts.¹⁹³ He impresses on his Christian audience that it is they who are the true Israel.¹⁹⁴

Donahue suggests that one reason for the unpopularity of Jewish Christians with the Christian leadership was due to the former's opposition to a monarchical episcopate; they preferred to retain the synagogue custom of governance by elders.¹⁹⁵ Donahue was writing specifically of Ignatius of Antioch at the end of the second century, but the remark could apply equally to other Christian leaders. Jewish Christian groups could therefore demonstrate a different model of organisation to Christians who might prefer such a model and attempt to convince other Christians of its superiority.

There were reasons other than doctrinal arguments for non-Jewish Christians to distance themselves from the Jews. The connection with Judaism had become to seem increasingly undesirable as successive Jewish uprisings tried the patience of the Roman authorities.¹⁹⁶ Yet Ephrem Syrus, in the second half of the fourth century, was still berating those members of his flock in Edessa who continued to attend the synagogue, to observe Jewish festivals and practise various Jewish traditions, including circumcision.¹⁹⁷ The situation was similar in Antioch. John Chrysostom condemned those Christians of his own city who persisted in the observance of Jewish law, or some parts of it, in his *Homilies against the Jews*.

It is a possibility, although only a possibility, that diatribes by Christian leaders did no more than excite the curiosity of some members of their flock, leading them to attend Jewish festivals. A

¹⁹³ St. Augustine, *Aduersus Iudaeos* II. 3 (P.L. XLII, pp.52-53).

¹⁹⁴ St. Augustine, *Aduersus Iudaeos* VII. 10f (P.L. XLII pp. 58-59).

¹⁹⁵ Paul J. Donahue, 'Jewish Christianity in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch,' *V. C.* 32 (1978), p. 91.

¹⁹⁶ Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁷ Han Drijvers, 'Syrian Christianity and Judaism,' in Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak (edd), *The Jews Among the Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 142-143.

modern analogy might be the occasional demands by religious leaders for the banning of a book or film they deem offensive. Such strident criticism often calls attention to works that otherwise would have been ignored. It is not unknown for a banned book to become a best seller. In similar fashion it can be imagined that the criticism of Jewish celebrations, necessarily involving some description of them, attracted the attention of non-Jewish Christians, causing them to see for themselves what the fuss was about.

Successive rebellions against Rome resulted in the movement's non-Jewish adherents wishing to distance themselves from the rebellious Jews. Admittedly the violence of 115 to 117 was directed principally against the Greek populations of the areas involved: Egypt, Cyrenaica and Cyprus, rather than against the ruling power itself.¹⁹⁸ The Romans were forced to become involved to suppress the inter-communal violence. The Bar Kocheba revolt of 132 to 135 in Palestine, however, was directed against the occupying power. The advantages of being able to claim respectability through antiquity came gradually to be outweighed by the disadvantages of association with such a troublesome community. The appeal to antiquity was one of the motives that inspired the writer of the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul. *Ep. XIV* praises S for his *reuelata quae paucis diuinitas concessit* as well as his *inreprehensibilem sophiam*.¹⁹⁹ Thus Seneca, a Roman senatorial aristocrat of the first century, is depicted as open to Christian conversion.

At the beginning of the second century an outside observer like Tacitus, who knew something of the history and the customs of the Jews, even if his information is not wholly accurate,²⁰⁰ appears to recognise Christianity as something apart from Judaism. In his description of the punishment meted out to Christians in the wake of the fire in Neronian Rome Tacitus does not make specific mention the Jews. This appearance, however, is deceptive. Christianity's relationship to Judaism

¹⁹⁸ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. II, part II: *Ancient Times*, second edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, p. 94.

¹⁹⁹ Barlow, *Epistolae*, *Ep. XIV*.

²⁰⁰ Tacitus, *Histories* V. 2-13. For a brief commentary on this passage, see Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. II, *From Tacitus to Simplicius*, Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980, pp. 2-4.

can be inferred from his comment that the *superstitio* arose in *Iudaea*.²⁰¹ To a Latin speaker the connection between *Iudaea* and *Iudaeus* is immediately obvious in a way that in English the relationship of Jew and Judea is not.²⁰² Stern believes that Rome's non-Christian Jews, probably the majority of the city's Jewish population after all, were not affected by this persecution of Christians.²⁰³ In his opinion the claim made in the spurious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul that Jews also suffered is unreliable.²⁰⁴ This point is discussed in Chapter One above. It is difficult to be sure how much of Tacitus' brief account of the Christian community in Rome is a reflection of the attitudes and knowledge of his own time and how much is an accurate record from Nero's reign.

At the end of Domitian's reign many Romans in positions of authority continued to regard Christianity as a Jewish sect.²⁰⁵ Imperial finances having failed to keep pace with imperial expenditure, the emperor resorted to extreme measures to raise money.²⁰⁶ The particular tax that concerns us here is the Temple tax, still collected from Jews despite there no longer being a Jewish Temple to support. Domitian is supposed to have been particularly ferocious in its collection.²⁰⁷ He sought out those *qui uelut inprofessi Iudaicam uiuerent uitam uel dissimulata origine imposita genti tributa non pependissent*.²⁰⁸ There seem to have been two kinds of people involved: those who were not Jews but who followed Jewish customs and those who were Jews

²⁰¹ ... *per Iudaeam, originem eius mali*... (Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 44). See also Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. II, p. 5. For an opinion that Tacitus failed to differentiate Christian from Jew and that Suetonius was able to detect the difference, see Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*, p. 241. I do not find this argument persuasive.

²⁰² Philip F. Esler, 'Palestinian Judaism in the First Century,' in Dan Cohn-Sherbok and John M. Court (edd), *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World*, the Biblical Seminar 79, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 27f.

²⁰³ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. II, p. 91.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* XXV; Sulpicius Severus, *Chroniques* ii. 31; Colin Wells, *The Roman Empire*, Glasgow: Fontana, 1984, p. 183; Hengel, 'Early Christianity,' p. 37.

²⁰⁶ Domitian had a ninety-year-old man publicly stripped to check whether he was circumcised (Suetonius, *Domitian* XII). Suetonius does not reveal whether the man was in fact circumcised. The disrespectful treatment of such an old man, whether Jewish or not, was expected to shock and horrify the reader, and, incidentally, to add to the portrayal of Domitian as a 'wicked' emperor. Members of the senatorial nobility held firm views on the proper treatment to be accorded people at various stages in life, especially the young and the very old (Pliny *Ep.* X. xcvi. 2. See also Appendix A below).

²⁰⁷ Suetonius, *Domitian* XII.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* Jones notes that the translation and the implications of this passage are disputed (Brian W. Jones [ed.], *Suetonius, Domitian*, London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996, p.103).

but who pretended not to be. The second group is easier to dispose of. It consisted of those who were Jews by right of birth, but who were trying to conceal their origins for whatever reasons. One obvious motive is that they were trying to evade the Temple tax. Those *qui uelut inprofessi Iudaicam uiuerent uitam* are more mysterious. Were they Christians, as suggested by Wells?²⁰⁹ Were they Jews pretending not to be Jews while continuing to observe Jewish custom? It is possible that they included God-fearers. Such people could have provided camouflage for Jews attempting to evade the Temple tax. Hence Domitian's decision to check whether the alleged tax evader was circumcised. Circumcision, although practised by several other groups in the ancient world, was generally regarded as the peculiar mark of Judaism. The operation transformed God-fearer into convert. If this man were circumcised he was a Jew and liable for the Temple tax. The question is: were there enough God-fearers in Rome to enable a Jew, perhaps more than one Jew, to 'disappear' in the manner suggested? The evidence indicates that there were.

There were non-Jews in Rome whose observance of Jewish custom attracted comment, often unfavourable.²¹⁰ Epictetus' reference has been noted previously. Juvenal rebukes a father who is described as *metuentem sabbata*, whose sons are circumcised and *nil praeter nubes et caeli numen adorant*.²¹¹ Juvenal's point is that the father sets a bad example to his sons, who then in the nature of things are even worse. His satire would have been toothless if this situation were unfamiliar to his audience, that is, a non-Jewish parent who observed certain Jewish traditions and raised his children as Jews.

God-fearers made up a significant proportion of the membership of the only synagogue for which there is quantitative evidence for their existence.²¹² The Aphrodisias inscription lists 54 θεοσεβεῖς, men who appear not to have been Jews by birth but who were sufficiently interested in Judaism to have had their names added to a list of Jews contributing to a Jewish charity.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Wells, *The Roman Empire*, p. 183.

²¹⁰ See, for example, Juvenal *Sat.* 14. 96 and Horace *Sat.* 1. 9. 68-72

²¹¹ Juvenal, *Sat.* 14. 96.

²¹² Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, p. 65.

²¹³ Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, pp. 45, 56f.

Two were committed enough to belong to a group apparently devoted to study and prayer.²¹⁴ Reynolds and Tannenbaum suggest that the situation in Aphrodisias might have been (the authors stress that this is no more than a possibility) the norm rather than the exception.²¹⁵ Even if some or all of the non-Jewish donors lacked any religious commitment, as Lieu suggests,²¹⁶ the inscription demonstrates the degree to which Jewish institutions were integrated into at least one community in the Roman Empire. Local worthies added synagogues to those institutions they deemed deserving of their support. Even more interesting is the fact that synagogues were prepared to accept such support, even if they had to disguise it as a donation from proselytes to provide a cloak of respectability for a pagan contribution.

5. 11 The *Didascalia Apostolorum*

The evidence, then, indicates that there were non-Jews who lived like Jews.²¹⁷ If this were not so there would have been little point in trying to hide one's Jewish origin while continuing to obey Jewish law. There is evidence that as late as the third century, at least in Syria, there were Christians who insisted that Jewish Law must still be followed. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* preserves contemporary information on the relationship between some Jews and some Christians in the Greek east of the third century.²¹⁸ The text was written originally in Greek, but is preserved in its complete form as a Syriac translation dated no later than the end of the fourth century,²¹⁹ and as extensive fragments in Latin,²²⁰ that have been assigned also to the end of the fourth century.²²¹ The Latin translation indicates that some of the problems that beset Christian circles in the Greek-speaking east were relevant in the Latin-speaking west.²²² One of these

²¹⁴ Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, p. 56f.

²¹⁵ Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, pp. 88-89. See also Margaret H. Williams, 'The Jews and Godfearers Inscription from Aphrodisias – a Case of Patriarchal Interference in Early Third Century Caria?' *Historia* XLI (1992), pp. 309-310.

²¹⁶ Lieu, 'Do God-Fearers Make Good Christians?' p. 336f.

²¹⁷ See Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads,' pp. 137-138.

²¹⁸ Connolly (ed), *Didascalia Apostolorum*, pp. xxvi, lxxxvii-xci.

²¹⁹ Connolly (ed), *Didascalia Apostolorum*, p. xvii.

²²⁰ Connolly (ed), *Didascalia Apostolorum*, p. xi.

²²¹ Connolly (ed), *Didascalia Apostolorum*, p. xvii.

²²² Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, 'The *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus,' *J ECS* 9. 4 (2001): p.488.

problems was the question of the relationship between Jews and Christians, at both the individual and institutional levels.

The document's unknown author claims that the *Didascalia* was compiled by the apostles at Jerusalem immediately following the council described in Acts 15. The work criticises various heresies but Connolly believes that the author's main polemic is directed against those who continue to observe Jewish customs.²²³ It is clear that there are people attracted from the synagogue who expect to be able to continue in their observance of Jewish custom.

*Qui autem conuertentur de populo ut credant Deo et saluatori nostro Iesu Christo, iam priorem conuersationem non tenea(n)t obseruantes uincula uana et purificationes et segregationes et aspersiones baptismi et escarum discretiones...*²²⁴

[But those who have been converted from the people to believe in God our saviour Jesus Christ, should not henceforth continue in their previous conversation, that they should keep vain obligations, purifications and sprinklings and baptisms and distinctions of meats...]²²⁵

The author claims that Christian baptism abolishes Jewish ceremonial law.

“For the Second Legislation was imposed for the making of the calf and for idolatry. But you through baptism have been set free from idolatry, and from the Second Legislation, which was imposed on account of idols, you have been released.”²²⁶

According to this letter the old covenant had been superseded and Christians were not to obey the ‘second legislation’ of Moses.²²⁷ The text demonstrates that there were still some Christians in the writer's own time who believed that they ought to observe Jewish practice. If there had not been the writer would not have included this advice. There is, unfortunately, no indication of the numbers of these people. Surely it must have been a significant number, or perhaps included prominent members of the Christian community. Nor do we learn whether these ‘Judaisers’ were

²²³ Connolly (ed), *Didascalia Apostolorum*, p. xxxiii.

²²⁴ *Didascalia Apostolorum* XXVI. vi. 15 (Connolly (ed.), p. 217).

²²⁵ *Didascalia, Apostolorum* XXVI. vi. 15, trans. G. W. Clarke (personal communication).

²²⁶ *Didascalia Apostolorum* XXVI. vi. 17f (trans. Connolly, p. 224f).

²²⁷ Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 558.

Jews attracted to Christianity or whether they were Christians attracted by Judaism. Some scholars believe that the document was aimed at Jewish Christians rather than Judaizing Christians.²²⁸ Simon suggests that the document was composed by a Jewish-Christian group.²²⁹ Whoever was responsible for the letter, it demonstrates that in Syria in the third century there was still close contact between synagogue and church.

The writer recommends fasting on a Friday because, he claims, that was the day that the Jews, whom he refers to as “the People”, crucified “the Saviour.”²³⁰ In so doing they also killed themselves.²³¹ It is unclear whether his meaning is that the Jews have rejected the opportunity of eternal life or whether a more sinister meaning is intended. Certainly it could be read as implying that the Jews had deprived themselves of any right to live. Its translation into Latin indicates that the *Didascalia* was considered to be relevant to the Latin west of the fourth century.²³²

5.12 *et Iudaei et Christiani*

Until at least A.D. 404²³³ there were still communities with a double identity, whose members saw no conflict in being both Christian and Jewish. The Nazaraeans were to be found in all areas of the east where there were synagogues.²³⁴ These people claimed to be both Jews and Christians: ... *uolunt et Iudaei et Christiani*.²³⁵ As far as St. Jerome is concerned it was not possible to be both and in his view the members of this community *nec Iudaei sunt, nec Christiani*. This opinion is contained in a letter to St. Augustine, part of an acerbic exchange between the two men concerned mainly with Jerome’s translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin. Augustine points out that St. Paul was a Jew and even after he became a Christian

²²⁸ Reuven Kimelman, ‘*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Prayer in Late Antiquity,’ in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. II, p. 243 with notes 116, 117 and 118.

²²⁹ Simon, *Verus Israel*, pp. 94, 306.

²³⁰ *Didascalia XXI*. V. 19 (Connolly (ed), p. 190).

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² Fonrobert, ‘The *Didascalia Apostolorum*,’ p.488.

²³³ A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, Supplements to *Nouum Testamentum*, vol. XXXVI, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973, p. 200.

²³⁴ ... *per totas Orientis synagogas inter Iudaeos heresis est, quae dicitur Minaeorum, et a pharisaeis huc usque damnatur, quos uulgo Nazaraeos nuncupant...* (St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 13 [CSEL LV, p. 381]).

²³⁵ *ibid.*

continued to observe Jewish tradition.²³⁶ He did so, suggests Augustine, in order to demonstrate that it was not harmful for a Jew who had converted to Christianity to continue to observe the customs of his ancestors, provided that he knew that such ceremonies did not ensure salvation.²³⁷ It was partly for this reason, that Jewish law was unnecessary to salvation, that Paul did not insist that it be binding on Gentile converts.²³⁸

Jerome's reply to Augustine's letter, dated to 403, pointing out Paul's continuing obedience to Jewish Law even after his 'conversion' to Christianity, is indignant. Jewish ceremonies are not merely harmful to Christians, they are fatal.²³⁹ Furthermore this applies to all Christians, regardless of whether they are of Jewish or non-Jewish background.²⁴⁰ Does this imply the continued existence into the fifth century of Christian groups whose members continued to regard themselves as Jews who accepted Jesus as Christ, or is Jerome referring to contemporary Jews who converted? He accuses St. Augustine of wanting to reintroduce a particular heresy.

*Si hoc uerum est in Cerinthi et Hebionis heresim delabimur, ... et heresim
sceleratissimam rursus in ecclesiam introducere.*²⁴¹

This is a deliberate misunderstanding by Jerome of Augustine's position. It is consistent with the acrimonious tone of the dispute between them, an acrimony barely cloaked in, certainly not disguised by, pious civilities. It is clear that Augustine was not proposing that contemporary Jews converting to Christianity be permitted to retain their ancestral rites.²⁴² He was criticising Jerome's commentary on the dispute between St. Peter and St. Paul as to whether Gentile converts should convert to Judaism, with all that entailed, before being permitted to join the community of Jesus believers. Augustine does not suggest that Paul's decision on this matter should apply in their time. Clarification of his views on the matter is set out at length in the reply

²³⁶ *nam utique Iudaeus (sc. Paulus) erat, Christianus autem factus non Iudaeorum sacramenta reliquerat...* ([St. Augustine, *Ep.* XL. 4 [CSEL XXXIV, p. 73]).

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ *ibid.*

²³⁹ St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 14 (CSEL LV, p. 382).

²⁴⁰ St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 14 (CSEL LV, p. 383).

²⁴¹ St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 13 (CSEL LV, pp. 381, 382). It is in this context that Jerome mentions the Nazaraeans as a contemporary problem rather than a heresy that has been vanquished.

²⁴² *et dicis eas (sc. caerimonias) non esse perniciosas his, qui eas uelint, sicut a parentibus acceperint, custodire* (St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 14 [CSEL LV, p. 382])

to this letter.²⁴³ A long letter to one Asellicus on the same subject, written late in the year 418, provides more details of Augustine's stance.²⁴⁴

Jerome condemns the Nazaraeans as heretics. He claims that they have also been declared heretical *a pharisaeis*.²⁴⁵ Kimelman suggests that these are some of the people cursed in the *Birkat Ha Minim*.²⁴⁶ That both Christian and Jewish leaders condemned Jewish-Christians as heretics indicates that each religion claimed these people as members of its community, albeit deviant members, who can and must be reclaimed to practices the leadership judges to be orthodox.²⁴⁷

For four centuries, probably longer, some Jews accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah while continuing to observe Jewish Law.²⁴⁸ Boyarin places the "definitive schism" between Christianity and rabbinic Judaism in the fourth century.²⁴⁹ This persistence in the face of opposition from the leadership of both religious communities is remarkable. Priests and rabbis (or Pharisees) might insist on a clean break, but what of their respective congregations? The following section provides glimpses of a different attitude.

5. 13 *Oea quippe ciuitas*

In one of his letters to Jerome Augustine describes a remarkable event.²⁵⁰ The Bishop of Oea read from Jerome's translation of the Book of Jonah during a service. One word was rendered differently from the translation of the Septuagint. There was an immediate and indignant uproar as the congregation challenged the new translation. Its members forced the bishop to consult the

²⁴³ *Epistula Augustini ad Hieronymum* CXVI. 9-12, 14-18 (CSEL LV, p. 402ff).

²⁴⁴ St. Augustine, *Ep.* CXCVI.

²⁴⁵ St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 13 (CSEL LV, p. 381).

²⁴⁶ Kimelman, '*Birkat Ha-Minim*,' p. 244. Fonrobert disputes this identification (Fonrobert, '*The Didascalia Apostorum*, p. 489). Simon suggests that Jews may have used *minim* to describe all dissidents, including the various forms of Christianity (Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 183).

²⁴⁷ See Segal, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 152.

²⁴⁸ *Nazaraeos nuncupant, qui credunt in Christum, filium dei natum de Maria uirgine, et eum dicunt esse, qui sub Pontio Pilato et passus est et resurrexit, in quem et nos credimus...* (St. Jerome, *Ep.* CXII. 13).

²⁴⁹ Daniel Boyarin, 'Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism,' *J ECS* 6 4 (1998): p. 613.

²⁵⁰ St. Augustine, *Ep.* LXXI. 5 (CSEL XXXIV, p. 253).

local Jewish community, who confirmed the Greek translation and the Latin version derived from it. The unfortunate bishop was then threatened with the mass desertion of his congregation if he did not alter Jerome's translation to agree with the Septuagint.

This story provides us with several insights. At the beginning of the fifth century at least one North African congregation was familiar with the Greek Septuagint, either in the original or in Latin translation. Some of its members had memorised sections, or were following the bishop's reading from their own copy, perhaps a mixture of both.²⁵¹ Verses memorised were not chosen at random. Simon suggests that this particular section was considered significant because it concerns divine punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness, a recurring theme in Christian polemic.²⁵²

Since the bishop was using Jerome's Latin translation from the Hebrew it can be assumed that the congregation consisted largely or wholly of people who could understand Latin. It is unclear whether the rebels within the congregation overwhelmed the bishop by means of their sheer number, or whether the challenge was mounted by fewer, more influential, members. In either case they were able to intimidate their bishop. These Christians regarded the Septuagint as authoritative and were prepared to question any deviation from it. They were prepared, and able, to force their bishop to seek an opinion from the Jews and to accept that opinion where it differed from that of Jerome.²⁵³

As late as the beginning of the fifth century, then, in one western city at least, there was still friendly contact between some portion of a Christian congregation and a synagogue. The Christians, moreover, were willing to accept Jewish authority on scripture and to force their bishop to do likewise. Christian leaders may well have disapproved, judging from Augustine's language.

... *ut cogeretur episcopus... Iudaeorum testimonium flagitare.*²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ For a brief discussion of literacy in the ancient Roman world, see Chapter 1. 4.

²⁵² Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 186.

²⁵³ I have concentrated on the positive aspect of this event for Jewish/Christian relationships at a popular level in this town. Simon indicates a negative dimension also (*Verus Israel*, p. 185).

²⁵⁴ St. Augustine, *Ep.* LXXI. 5.

This comment could be a reflection of Augustine's own feelings rather than an accurate report. It is obvious that he himself was doubtful either of the Jews' linguistic expertise or their good faith, or both.²⁵⁵ It was one thing for Jerome to associate with Jews, as he was forced to do if he wanted to study Hebrew, and to accept Jewish scholarship to assist in his translation of Scripture. It was another matter altogether for ordinary Christians to defer to Jewish learning. Some allowance should perhaps be made for rhetorical exaggeration on Augustine's part. He had doubts about the wisdom of Jerome's enterprise and would have preferred that he concentrate on translating the Septuagint into Latin.²⁵⁶ It was, he felt, unnecessary to consult either Hebrew Scripture or the Jews.²⁵⁷ Although Augustine's account of the rebellious congregation might be exaggerated, there is no need to dismiss it as a fabrication. The congregation, after all, was doing no more than carrying out Jerome's peevish advice to Augustine. Anyone who doubted the accuracy of Jerome's translation had only to consult the Jews!²⁵⁸

It can be seen, then, that at the time the fictitious correspondence began to circulate amongst Christians, it was acknowledged, at least in some Christian quarters, that St. Paul had remained an observant Jew. The author of *Ep. V* in the fictitious correspondence wishes to make it clear, however, that Paul has abandoned Judaism in favour of Christianity (*a ritu et secta ueteri recesseris et aliorum conuerteris*).²⁵⁹ The writer wants to separate Paul from his Jewish roots as part of an effort to demonstrate that Christianity had long been a separate entity from Judaism. His aim is to establish that as early as the latter part of the first century, St. Paul himself had converted from Judaism. If Paul had rejected Jewish observances then the writer's fourth century audience was expected to follow his example. It is not possible to 'prove' that this was the writer's intention; the evidence is circumstantial at best. It is possible to claim that the letters could have been employed to this end, whether by the author, by whoever introduced the letters into the wider Christian community, and/or by those who read the letters to illiterate members of that community, accompanied by a commentary.

²⁵⁵ *utrem autem illi (sc. Iudaei) inperitia an malitia... (ibid).*

²⁵⁶ St. Augustine, *Ep. LXXI*. 3-4; St. Jerome *Ep. CXII*. 19f.

²⁵⁷ St. Augustine, *Ep. LXXI*. 6.

²⁵⁸ St. Jerome, *Ep. CXII*. 20-21.

²⁵⁹ Barlow, *Epistolae, Ep. V*.

When the apocryphal correspondence first appeared there were still Christian communities with a double identity. Their members were observant Jews who claimed to be Christian. Such claims were rejected by Christian and Jewish authority alike. These groups appeared to be more numerous in the Greek east rather than the Latin-speaking west. Nevertheless in the west, in Africa, there was still friendly contact between ordinary members of church and synagogue, despite the disapproval of both bishop and rabbi.

The debate between and Jewish proselyte and Christian recorded, or perhaps invented, by Tertullian took place at the end of the second century.²⁶⁰ The letter addressed to Seneca and supposedly from the High Priest Annas is evidence of continuing Jewish missionary activity in the west during the fourth century. There appears to have been no contact between ‘Annas’ and the fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul. They speak past each other, not to each other. They provide two examples of the pseudepigraphic writings so common in the fourth century.

5. 14 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the gradual replacement of Greek by Latin as the language of Rome’s Christians. The fictitious correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul has Paul writing to Seneca in Latin. This forms part of the author’s attempt to portray Christianity as an ancient, and therefore respectable, Roman *religio*. And it was not sufficient that Paul should write in Latin; he must also be seen mastering (or to be about to master) the Latin rhetorical style to be expected of a man of high status.

A further objective of the correspondence is to separate Paul from his Jewish background. Towards the end of the fourth century, despite legislation forbidding it, Jewish missionary activity continued. There were still Christians who recognised no conflict in being Christian while observing at least some Jewish traditions and attending Jewish ceremonies. The

²⁶⁰ Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 65.

correspondence shows such misguided people the error of their ways by demonstrating that St. Paul himself had repudiated Judaism.

The correspondence wishes to distance Christianity from Judaism but implicitly recognises that in Nero's time it would have been difficult for the authorities to distinguish them. The report of the fire in *Ep. XI* agrees closely enough with other surviving accounts to lead to a cautious acceptance of the accuracy of the author's report that Jews were also condemned as arsonists along with Christians.

Separating St. Paul from his Jewish and Greek heritage was only part of the intention of the author of the correspondence. Another objective was to show Seneca as Christian sympathiser. This was part of the appeal to *mos maiorum*. The letters portray Seneca, *Neronis magister et illius temporis potentissimus*, not only as an intimate of the Christian apostle but also as his instructor in rhetoric. The author does not mention that he was also *discipulus stoici*. No doubt this was a deliberate omission. He is seeking to portray Seneca as Christian sympathiser, if not convert, so it is sensible not to draw attention to his pagan philosophy.

The following chapter discusses the historical background against which the correspondence was written and circulated, including factors that influenced the manner in which the author presented Seneca and the reasons that influenced this portrayal.

CHAPTER SIX

Christianising Rome – and Seneca

*Perpendenti tibi ea sunt reuelata quae paucis diuinitas concessit.*¹

In the previous chapter we saw the effort by the unknown author of the apocryphal letters to have his Seneca transform ‘St. Paul’ into a Roman citizen of the proper educational standard to be expected of a Roman of high status. At the same time as he was Romanising St. Paul the author was attempting also to convince his readership that Seneca had abandoned paganism just as Paul had abandoned Judaism. In this he was aided by Seneca’s own criticism of many pagan rites. Such criticism could only help in strengthening the impression of a Seneca under Christian influence, especially when his words are quoted by a Christian author like Minucius Felix.²

One reason for the creation of the letters was to demonstrate that Seneca regarded Christian belief as worthy of serious philosophical discussion. In the world of the correspondence Seneca himself had written a work inspired by Christianity.³ There is no mention in the correspondence of Seneca’s adherence to the Stoa. The author did not want to confuse the issue when he was trying to portray Seneca as at least sympathetic to Christian beliefs, perhaps even a convert. In any case in his eyes Seneca’s role as teacher of *Latinitas* and *Romanitas* was more important than his pagan philosophy. His mention of Lucilius in *Ep. I* does hint at an acquaintance with Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*.

Both of these intentions, transforming Paul into a Roman of high status and Seneca into a Christian, were designed to prove to his audience that Christianity was a Roman *religio*. That audience, he hoped, would include not only Christians who would be made to feel pride in the antiquity and the essential *Romanitas* of their religion, but would include also the recalcitrant members of Rome’s senatorial aristocracy who remained resistant to Christian conversion.

¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* XIV.

² See Chapter 4. 2 above.

³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* III and p. 37f.

Barlow has shown that the correspondence was composed between 325 and 392 and closer to 392 than to 325.⁴ It made its first appearance amongst Christian groups in 392 or a little earlier.⁵ The following discussion is based on this assessment. It places the correspondence in the historical context of the fourth century. The intention of this chapter is to shed light on the possible motives and concerns of its author.

The letters were composed under different circumstances than obtained a little later after they had been made available to a wider audience. They were in circulation by 392, when Jerome mentions them. If Barlow is correct, they were introduced into the Christian community only a short time before then. So shortly, in fact, that Jerome himself had not yet read them and was relying on second-hand reports for his knowledge of their content.⁶ If they were as well received as Jerome indicates it is a safe assumption that they were still being read in 393. Some implications of this timing are discussed below. Firstly, however, it is desirable to sketch briefly the history of Rome at the end of the fourth century in order to provide the historical setting for both the creation of the correspondence and for its early circulation within the Christian community. This survey of the historical background is confined to the city of Rome itself where the letters were written and first introduced into the wider community. It is based on secondary sources to provide an overview of modern scholarly opinion on the topic. The *Theodosian Code* has, however, been consulted as a relevant source. The purpose of this survey is to show generally the fourth century setting in which the author composed his letters and his first audience read them.

6. 1 A Brief History of the Fourth Century

The fourth century in Rome began and ended with a pair of remarkable events. In the first decade of the century a pagan emperor courted the city's Christian population, in its last decade a Christian pretender sought the support of Rome's pagans.

⁴ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 81, 87, 89.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, p. 81.

In contrast to the practice of his third century predecessors Maxentius made a point of residing in Rome after his accession to the throne. Rome was his power base and where he was acclaimed in the ancient manner.⁷ To underline this claim to tradition he at first chose the title of *princeps*, although he soon adopted that of Augustus.⁸ The other emperors' refusal to acknowledge his legitimacy marks him as a usurper.⁹ The support of the city's population was essential if he were to survive. Soon after his accession Maxentius allowed the anti-Christian measures of Diocletian and Galerius to lapse by declining to enforce them.¹⁰ More surprising, in 311, despite being beset by military and financial crises, he overturned their legislation.¹¹ In the opinion of Maxentius the Christian population of Rome was significant enough, in either numbers or influence or both to be worth appealing in an effort to gain its aid for his cause.

In the last decade of the century we find the situation reversed: a Christian emperor attempting to gain the support of pagans. In 392 Eugenius, although a Christian, permitted the restoration of the altar of Victory.¹² He balked at restoring imperial financial support to the ancient cults, but did agree to fund them from his own resources. The pagan population of Rome was still significant enough, in numbers or prestige, possibly both, for Eugenius to overcome his Christian scruples. He did not care to go too far, partly because of his own Christian beliefs, but also partly in an attempt to minimise the offence to the Christian population of Rome. He hoped also to gain the support of the Christian emperor in the east. This hope was dashed when Theodosius named his son as Augustus.¹³ At the beginning of 393 possibly even by the end of 392, Eugenius knew that he had failed in his attempt to have Theodosius recognise him as a colleague. Having been rejected by Constantinople Eugenius realised that his only hope lay with Rome. To have any hope of success he needed the assistance of as much of the population as possible. He was not interested in leading a pagan rebellion. His ambitions were personal and political, not religious.

⁷ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 53.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 64.

¹¹ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 65.

¹² John Curran, 'From Jovian to Theodosius,' in Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (edd), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIII, *The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 109.

¹³ *ibid.*

In fact it is doubtful whether most of the pagan aristocrats who joined him did so for religious reasons, although his willingness to permit the continuation of the traditional ceremonies did him no harm in their eyes. It is later writers, assisted by Theodosian propaganda and by the reported comment of one pagan contemporary aristocrat, Virius Nichomachus Flavianus, who have romanticised an attempted coup into paganism's last stand. Flavianus himself probably hoped for no more than a return to a more tolerant Christian rule that would continue official support for the ancient cults.

Eugenius was proclaimed Augustus on the 22nd of August, 392.¹⁴ In April 393 Rome acknowledged him as emperor. Since Jerome mentions the letters in his *De uiris illustribus* the correspondence must have been introduced into the Christian community by the time this book appeared in 392.¹⁵ It is probable that letters had been composed before 392, but it is possible that they were written in that year and released before August of 392. Christians were being introduced to them when an embattled Christian emperor sought the support of the pagan senatorial nobility by compromising on the restoration of assistance to the ancient cults. At the same time it suited Theodosius to portray Eugenius' regime as that of a pagan usurpation of a Christian empire. Imperial propaganda thus changed yet another dynastic struggle for supremacy into a battle for the soul of Rome and its empire.

By the time the correspondence was released into the wider Christian community the dispute over the altar of Victory had been settled, but dissatisfaction with the decision obviously remained. Eugenius' first overtures to the Roman senate after Theodosius rejected his legitimacy included an undertaking to restore the altar. Ten years or more later Prudentius issued a revised version of his speech against Symmachus' appeal to restore the altar.¹⁶ Prudentius' decision to publish this speech owed much to his desire to show himself the equal to Symmachus in oratorical skill. The style was more important than the content. Nevertheless it is difficult to believe that Prudentius felt that the subject itself held no interest even at this late date. Pagan observances continued, despite the efforts of both secular and religious authority to eradicate them. Prudentius might well have felt that his poem was still relevant.

¹⁴ Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court*, p. 239.

¹⁵ Barlow(ed.), *Epistolae*, pp. 81, 87, 89.

¹⁶ See section 2 below.

This controversy over the altar of Victory has often been discussed. It is still worth a brief survey here for the interesting sidelight it casts on some Christians in imperial service.

6. 2 The Dispute over the Altar of Victory

It was Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who led Christian opposition to the restoration of the altar. Ambrose was unusual for his period. He was an aristocrat holding high office in the Christian Church. His family might have only just made the census, but they did make it. McLynn comments that “Ambrose belongs rather to the margins of aristocratic society at Rome...”¹⁷

He shared a similar social and educational background with the pagan senators pressing for the reinstallation of the altar. They spoke the same language, literally and figuratively. According to Matthews, the ‘debate’ on the restoration of the altar of Victory, between the Christian bishop and Symmachus, the spokesman for the pagan senators, is notable for its courteous tone, despite the strong feelings on both sides.¹⁸ There was in fact no debate as such. Ambrose and Symmachus do not address each other on the topic. Both direct their arguments at the emperor. As a contrast, the letters addressed to St. Ambrose that are preserved in Symmachus’ correspondence read like those of a superior writing to an inferior friend. Symmachus takes it for granted that Ambrose will offer the expected assistance to those clients on whose behalf he writes and is willing, and able, to apply pressure if the task is not performed to his satisfaction.¹⁹

According to Ambrose’s eulogy on Valentinian II the young emperor had stood alone in his opposition to the restoration of the altar.²⁰ Some Christian aristocrats at the imperial court also felt the power of Roman tradition, even pagan Roman tradition.²¹ It is of course possible that it was not so much the power of tradition, more that they hesitated to put themselves at odds with some of Rome’s most powerful families.

¹⁷ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 33.

¹⁸ Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court*, p. 205.

¹⁹ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 264f, pp. 267-268.

²⁰ St. Ambrose, *De obitu Valentiniani* 19 (Document 43 in Brian Croke and Jill Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome. A Documentary Study*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1982, p. 53).

²¹ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 166 with note 33.

Ambrose claims to have in his possession a petition sent to him by Damasus, Bishop of Rome, some two years previously when Gratian had removed the altar and a pagan deputation led by Symmachus had sought unsuccessfully to have it restored. The document had been signed by Christian senators who opposed the pagans' petition.²² The obvious question, of course, is why had not Rome's Christian senators opposed the measure when it was first raised? Foreseeing the possibility of such a question Ambrose claims that they had boycotted the senate during the discussion as a form of protest.²³

If there were Christian nobles who sympathised with Symmachus' appeal to *mos maiorum* it is no wonder that Anonymous made his own appeal to *Romanitas* by portraying Seneca, himself a member of the senatorial aristocracy of his own time, as open to Christian belief. His purpose is to demonstrate that Christianity had appealed to members of the Roman nobility since its inception. It is noteworthy that Ambrose himself counters Symmachus' appeal to tradition with the bold assertion that Christianity is admirable for the very reason that it is new.²⁴ Ambrose could not compete with the long pedigree of Roman paganism that Symmachus could cite, but the author of the apocryphal correspondence supplies 'evidence' for a reasonably ancient tradition for Roman Christianity. The desire for such evidence provides a motive for the contemporary popularity of his creation. The idea on the part of the author of the correspondence to claim an ancient and Roman pedigree for his religion was not original with him. The Codex-Calendar of 354 presents the Christian past as venerable, and as Roman, as the pagan tradition.²⁵ This is not to suggest that our author had ever seen this work. It does indicate, however, that by the middle of the fourth century a serious claim was being made that Christianity could no longer be regarded as a novelty to be rejected on the grounds that it was a novelty.

It is possible that the author of the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul had not read the arguments from Symmachus on the restoration of the altar, although he might have

²² St. Ambrose, *Ep.* XVII. 10 (document 39 in Croke and Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth Century Rome*, p. 33).

²³ St. Ambrose, *Ep.* XVII. 11.

²⁴ St. Ambrose, *Ep.* XVIII. 11, 23-28, 30 (document 41 in Croke and Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome*).

²⁵ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 198.

done. It can hardly be doubted that he knew of the reasoning on both sides of the debate. Even if he did not he could have guessed that one appeal of the pagan side would inevitably be to tradition. He could not appeal to the same length of tradition, but he did invoke the name of a Roman philosopher who had lived three hundred years earlier, a respectable length of time, after all, even by Roman standards. The surprisingly favourable attitude shown to Nero in *Ep.* VII in the correspondence has already been noted.²⁶ Interest in Nero underwent a revival in the fourth century. Naturally his was not a memory that Ambrose cared to perpetuate.²⁷ This appeal to antiquity was even more telling, and optimistic, to some of the Christians reading or listening to his work in the context of a Christian ruler who was displaying what they regarded as undue favouritism to pagan cults.

The question arises as to how many Christians really were concerned by Eugenius' qualified official recognition of pagan cults. It has already been noted that there had been Christians at Valentinian's court who were willing to support Symmachus' appeal for the restoration of the altar of Victory. Roman Christians were, after all, immersed in an environment that was still largely pagan. They were surrounded by ancient pagan statues and temples; public and official processions with pagan overtones continued to be held.²⁸ Education also remained largely pagan.²⁹ Eugenius and his advisors concluded that it was worth the risk of offending some Christians to gain pagan support. Either there were, in their estimation, fewer and less powerful Christians to offend than potential supporters to gain, or they concluded that in fact few Christians would be outraged. Eugenius himself was a Christian. It is possible that ambition overcame his Christian scruples. It is also possible that he was in a position to gauge the level of offence likely to be caused by his actions.

Eugenius was not the first Christian emperor to display pagan sympathies. He had been preceded by that enthusiastic pagan convert, Julian. Julian's attempts both to limit Christian influence and to return the empire to the ancient pagan traditions are outlined below.

²⁶ Chapter 1. 12, commentary on *Ep.* VII.

²⁷ St. Ambrose, *Ep.* XVIII. 7.

²⁸ See Chapter 5. 7 above and section 5 below.

²⁹ See p. 22 above and section 3 below.

In contrast to Julian, Eugenius's qualified support for the pagan cause owed more to political considerations than to religious fervour. It was still worthwhile to cultivate the pagan senatorial aristocracy. This impression is strengthened by the absence of reprisals against the pagan survivors after Frigidus. Eugenius himself was captured and summarily despatched immediately after the battle.³⁰ Flavianus, who was, as Praetextus had been, a religiously committed pagan, committed suicide.³¹ Theodosius would have spared his life,³² but Flavianus, like Cato four centuries earlier, preferred not to survive the loss of his cause.³³ Theodosius did not carry out a purge. There is a mixture of motives here. Theodosius was influenced both by his Christian beliefs and by the long tradition of imperial clemency. More cynically, one has to suspect that he recognised the wisdom in not alienating a group that still wielded considerable power and influence. It is unknown how many members of Rome's senatorial aristocracy, whether Christian or pagan, fought for Eugenius at the Frigidus. Flavianus' is the only name we have.

The importance of the battle of the Frigidus as 'paganism's last stand' has been exaggerated. The idea that Eugenius' period in office gave rise to 'the last pagan revival' is equally misleading. Flavianus' son, despite also supporting Eugenius, was permitted to retain his inheritance and to resume his career, thanks to the efforts of his pagan father-in-law, Symmachus, who had not played an active role under the usurper.³⁴ Symmachus' efforts were assisted by Theodosius' unexpected death shortly after the uprising had been crushed. The new regime was understandably reluctant to pursue any course of action that could cause further civil strife.

More telling is the necessity for new laws designed to outlaw pagan rites, as well as the reiteration of existing measures, throughout the fifth century.³⁵ This topic has already been touched upon in the first chapter of this study.³⁶ The necessity for further laws aimed at closing

³⁰ Bloch, 'A New Document', 238.

³¹ Bloch, 'A New Document', p. 239.

³² Bloch, 'A New Document', p. 239, with note 90.

³³ Bloch, 'A New Document', p. 240.

³⁴ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 361; Cristiana Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus. A Political Biography*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 80-83.

³⁵ *Cod. Theod.* XVI. x. 19, 20-23, 25; *Codex Iustinianus* I. xi. 7-10, for example.

³⁶ See Chapter 1. 10 above.

loopholes, as well as the repetition of already existing legislation, indicates continuing non-observance. Enforcement of the laws was also problematic. There are hints that imperial officials were reluctant to condemn accused pagans brought before them.³⁷ Despite all attempts to outlaw it paganism continued to survive. Worse still, there were conversions to paganism, or Christian authorities feared there were.³⁸

Despite his bid to attract pagan support, Eugenius had had no plans for a pagan restoration. His was a delicate balancing act: to do, or to promise, enough to attract pagan support without alienating Christian support. He trod cautiously until it was clear that he could not hope for recognition from Theodosius. It is doubtful whether even Flavianus hoped for a pagan restoration. As far as he was concerned there was no need for a pagan because paganism was not yet dead.

We shall next examine the earlier, and genuine, attempt at a pagan restoration, the Emperor Julian's effort to reinstate paganism as the official religious observance of his empire.

6. 3 The Impact of the Emperor Julian

Given the brevity of his reign Julian's attempts to encourage paganism had little lasting impact. Such effects as there were, were largely psychological. Pagans, including aristocratic pagans, were encouraged and confirmed in their allegiance, despite the reservations some held about the Emperor's enthusiasm for animal sacrifice.³⁹ There is no evidence of wholesale conversion to paganism.⁴⁰ There were some prominent converts and opportunism has to be suspected as often as commitment.

Julian was concerned that comparatively few prominent pagans were prepared to rally to his cause.⁴¹ There were pagan aristocrats whose careers began under Julian and who later become prominent. Both Praetextatus and Symmachus had served under Julian. Both continued their careers under Christian emperors. The successful careers of these pagans who served Christian

³⁷ *Cod. Theod.* XVI. x. 13; *Codex Iustinianus* I. xi. 7.

³⁸ *Nou. Theod.* III.

³⁹ Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, pp. 175-176, 184.

⁴⁰ Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p. 168.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

emperors is evidence that religious adherence was not the only characteristic of a potential official to be taken into account. Depending on circumstances it might not be considered at all.

Julian's ending of imperial protection of Christianity seems to have been appreciated at lower levels of society, judging by the anti-Christian riots in various eastern cities, riots that the emperor was disinclined to suppress.⁴² These riots recalled disturbances in earlier times when many persecutions had arisen from local anti-Christian prejudices and hatreds. Such disorders had then often resulted in the involvement of the imperial authorities in the persecution.

Christians were understandably unnerved by this unexpected display of imperial paganism after a succession of Christian rulers. It was not only that an apparently Christian Caesar had turned into a pagan Augustus; some influential, and ambitious, men demonstrated that their own commitment to Christianity was shallow.⁴³ The popular anti-Christian demonstrations also revealed the survival of animosities that, in the not so distant past, had sometimes led to local outbreaks of persecution. And Julian did introduce measures that had, or in time would have had, important consequences. His financial and administrative reforms had an immediate impact as well as probable long-term effects, especially the termination of the various imperial privileges previously enjoyed by the Church.⁴⁴

His changes to the teaching profession especially were designed to have dramatic consequences in the future. Julian's educational reforms effectively banned Christians from teaching grammar, rhetoric and philosophy.⁴⁵ Christian students were not forbidden an education. They were permitted to attend a pagan tutor.⁴⁶ Julian states this clearly.

There is more to this legislation than its obvious and stated intent. Christian parents were faced with a dilemma. If they chose not to expose their sons to the new system of teaching that the

⁴² Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, p. 91; Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p. 182

⁴³ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, pp. 62-63, 85; Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p. 127. See also p. 54 above.

⁴⁴ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, p. 74, Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p. 138.

⁴⁵ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, pp. 83-84; Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p. 169f.

⁴⁶ Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, pp. 171, 172.

emperor hoped and intended would challenge their religious faith,⁴⁷ those sons would not be educated for a public career. They would also be unprepared to take their proper place in society.⁴⁸ The importance of this issue is highlighted in the pseudonymous correspondence. S refers to P's education as *non legitime*,⁴⁹ and is anxious to remedy this shortcoming.⁵⁰

The problem posed to Christians by Julian's educational reforms was not that all tutors would now be pagans. Most Christian students were already studying under pagan teachers. The problem was that teachers would now be expected to draw anti-Christian lessons from the texts studied.⁵¹ If ambition overcame caution and Christian students continued to attend school, Julian hoped what Christians feared, that the authority of their pagan teachers would prove more influential than the Christian faith of their family. The emperor was optimistic that his reforms would contribute to a reduction in Christian influence on public affairs. Julian was one emperor who did take into account the religious orientation of the high officials he chose. He preferred pagan appointees. The changes he proposed to the education system were designed to increase the number of pagans amongst potential officials.

There is a hint that Julian also attempted to eliminate Christians from the legal profession in Rome, or at least to restrict their numbers. Nörr suggests, tentatively, that the wording in line 25 of the law regulating the legal profession in Rome connects that law to Julian's earlier reform of the teaching profession:

*eos autem optimos eligi uelimus, animo prius, deinde facundia. Nam studiorum secunda gloria est, prima mentium.*⁵²

There are echoes here of the earlier legislation:

*Magistros studiorum doctoresque excellere oportet moribus primum, deinde facundia.*⁵³

⁴⁷ Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁸ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 200.

⁴⁹ Barlow, (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. VII.

⁵⁰ Barlow, (ed.), *Epistolae*, Epp. VII, IX, XIII.

⁵¹ Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, p. 173.

⁵² Bernhard Bischoff and Dieter Nörr, *Eine unbekannte Konstitution Kaiser Julians*, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Abhandlungen, neue Folge 58, München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1963, p. 23.

⁵³ *ibid.* The authors stress that "allerdings ist das nicht mehr als eine Hypothese."

It is possible that Ambrose refers to this legislation in one of his letters when he notes that Julian had forbidden Christians from speaking and teaching.⁵⁴ Both these laws were aimed at the Christians among the higher status groups of Roman society. The latter measure appears to have been specifically targeted at Rome and the Christian members of its senatorial aristocracy.⁵⁵ The conversion of this group is discussed below.

At the time that the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul was introduced into Christian circles in Rome, Julian's reign was still within living memory. It was far enough in the past to allow some of the events of that reign to be exaggerated in both memory and transmission. Nevertheless the letters were being read in the context of a newly installed Christian emperor who was prepared to tolerate, if not encourage, pagan rites. This was at the very time that the senior Augustus was legislating to curb pagan cults. And despite the accession of Christian emperors before and after Julian, Rome continued to be ruled by a senate that was still largely pagan. Fourth century emperors were rarely in Rome and the senate acted on their behalf. The Roman senate was both more famous, and more powerful, than that of Constantinople.⁵⁶ The author of the correspondence wished to portray Seneca, who had been a member of the senatorial aristocracy, as friend to St. Paul and in sympathy with, even an admirer of, his Christian beliefs.

Despite Julian's apparent lack of success in attracting converts to paganism there were still, in 381, twenty years after his death, Christians who were converting to paganism,⁵⁷ as indeed there were even later, in 438.⁵⁸

In the 380s Rome's temples remained open and the old gods were still worshipped.⁵⁹ In 383 conversion to paganism was forbidden.⁶⁰ In 391 all pagan cult practices were outlawed,

⁵⁴ *Petunt etiam, ut illis privilegia deferat, qui loquendi et docendi nostris communem usum Iuliani lege proxima denegarunt...* (St Ambrose, *Ep. LXXII* [Maur. 17], [CSEL LXXXII, pp. 12-13]).

⁵⁵ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, p. 92.

⁵⁶ Giuseppe Ricciotti, *Julian the Apostate*, M. Joseph Costelloe (trans), Milwaukee: Bruce, 1959, p. 176.

⁵⁷ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 210.

⁵⁸ *Nou. Theod.* i. iii.

⁵⁹ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 213.

including visits to temples, a measure clearly aimed at the Roman nobility.⁶¹ A law enacted in November of the following year prescribed severe penalties for even the private practice of pagan rites.⁶² Although this rescript was addressed to Rufinus in the east it was intended to apply throughout the empire. In August of 392 Eugenius had been proclaimed emperor at Lugdunum.⁶³ The timing of these events is coincidental. There is no evidence to indicate that Eugenius' elevation in any way provoked the Theodosian legislation. Eugenius was a Christian. There is no hint that he intended to convert to paganism. It was only after Theodosius finally rejected his legitimacy in January 393, by proclaiming his own son, Honorius, as Augustus, was it clear that he regarded Eugenius as a usurper. Just as Theodosius refused to acknowledge Eugenius, so the western empire failed to recognise Honorius' elevation.⁶⁴

In April 393 Eugenius was acknowledged as Augustus in Rome.⁶⁵ It was only then that he made a bid for the support of the pagan members of the Roman senate and perhaps for that of the pagans amongst the general population as well.⁶⁶ The anti-pagan legislation of the previous year had an effect. No doubt Rome's aristocratic pagans put pressure on Eugenius and the emperor, now branded a usurper, took the opportunity to win pagan support. In hindsight it may seem that he was grasping at straws and that his ambition was doomed to failure. Eugenius, however, was able to mount a serious campaign. His forces held the early advantage in the battle of Frigidus until defeated by a mixture of good fortune and good leadership on the Theodosian side.⁶⁷ There is no evidence to suggest that this early success had anything to do with any assistance he might have had from his pagan allies amongst the aristocracy. It is more likely to have been due to the military talent of Flavius Arbogastes, the real power behind Eugenius.

⁶⁰ *Cod. Theod.* XVI. vii. 3. The same regulation also forbade conversion to Judaism and Manichaeism.

⁶¹ *Cod. Theod.* XVI. x. 10.

⁶² *Cod. Theod.* XVI. x. 12.

⁶³ Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court*, p. 239.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court*, p. 240.

⁶⁶ See 6. 5 below.

⁶⁷ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, pp. 352-353.

6. 4 Converting the Roman Senatorial Aristocracy⁶⁸

The core of the aristocracy of Rome and Italy was made up of ancient and established senatorial families that enjoyed great prestige.⁶⁹ Members of such families could depend on the support of a network of family connections, relatives, friends, patrons and clients.⁷⁰ For certain career paths the support and approval of other aristocrats was more important than imperial favour.⁷¹ Members of these wealthy aristocratic families had greater freedom than men dependent on imperial favour or who desired a career in the imperial bureaucracy.⁷² They exerted considerable influence at a local level.⁷³ Their wealth and power made it unwise to alienate them.

Some members of senatorial families had converted as early as the reign of Constantine, mostly, it would seem, those with connections to the imperial bureaucracy.⁷⁴ An ambitious ‘new man,’ lacking the alliances that the old senatorial families took for granted and needing imperial patronage, was more likely to convert to the reigning emperor’s religion.⁷⁵ St. Augustine hints at the existence of such ‘status Christians.’⁷⁶ Salzman advises caution in accepting the charge, on the grounds that the factors that influence conversion are many and complex.⁷⁷ Nevertheless it should occasion no surprise to find that an ambitious man would be prepared to convert to gain imperial patronage and Augustine’s suspicions should not be dismissed out of hand. The number of pagan converts in Julian’s reign was small, but there were some. His reign was very brief, less than two years. A longer reign might have resulted in the conversion of a greater number of ambitious men seeking to curry favour with a pagan emperor. Eugenius provides just one

⁶⁸ For a definition see Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 20f.

⁶⁹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 97. It is unimportant whether the lineage was as genuine or as ancient as some families claimed. What mattered was the perception that it was.

⁷⁰ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 66f.

⁷¹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 81f.

⁷² Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 76.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 71; Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, London: Faber and Faber, 1972, p. 177.

⁷⁵ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 98f. Jones claims that “the old senatorial families of Rome remained predominately pagan down to the early fifth century” (A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602. A Social Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol II, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, p. 940).

⁷⁶ St. Augustine, *En. in psalm. 7. 9* (CSEL XCIII/1A, p. 153).

⁷⁷ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 104.

example of a man who was prepared to compromise his religious beliefs for the sake of ambition.

The continuing power, and number, of those in Rome who preferred the traditional rites is indicated by the fact that pagan sacrifices, although banned everywhere else throughout the empire, were still being performed in Rome as late as A.D. 386.⁷⁸ Pagan priests and Vestal Virgins continued to enjoy their traditional privileges until the end of the fourth century,⁷⁹ evidence that there remained a sufficient number of pagan families of the correct lineage and standing, to provide priests and Vestals,⁸⁰ although their number was declining.⁸¹

During the fourth century Christian leaders tried to attract members of the senatorial nobility to undertake prestigious positions in Christian institutions.⁸² It was not always easy to persuade these men, despite the fact that they were Christians, that the church could offer an acceptable career path. They had first to be convinced that the positions were, in fact, prestigious. Prestige could be conferred by the patronage of a Christian emperor, but we have already noted that the emperor's influence was not of overriding importance. Even Christian aristocrats were slow to perceive that church honours could be equal to secular honours and were just as slow to see any advantage in pursuing an ecclesiastical career.⁸³ St. Ambrose was one of the first western aristocrats to become a bishop and his family only just met the necessary criteria for inclusion in the aristocracy of his day.⁸⁴

Another potential problem in converting the aristocracy lay in the Christian attitude to wealth as expounded in the Gospels. Roman aristocrats, wealthy by definition, could not be expected to convert in any numbers if conversion entailed giving up their worldly goods, as advocated by the

⁷⁸ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 73 with note 19. It is one of the ironies of history that Julian, the enthusiastic pagan, never visited this most pagan of his major cities.

⁷⁹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 73 with note 18, pp. 183, 196.

⁸⁰ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 65.

⁸¹ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 134 -135.

⁸² Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 67, 200.

⁸³ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 132.

⁸⁴ Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 133. See also p. 233 with note 17 above.

Gospels.⁸⁵ Even if an enthusiastic convert wished to divest himself, or herself, of all worldly possessions there would be formidable opposition from other family members if too much of the family fortune were to leave the family. The problem had been identified and debated as early as the second century, if not already in the first.⁸⁶ The fact that it was being discussed in the fourth and fifth centuries by Ambrose and Augustine,⁸⁷ among others, demonstrates that the possession of wealth was still remained controversial, despite the fact that Christianity had long attracted wealthy converts, if not as many aristocratic ones. A comment by St. Augustine on the subject is worth quoting:

*Esto bonus, qui habes bona. Bonae sunt diuitiae, bonum est aurum, bonum est argentum, bonae familiae, bonae possessiones: omnia ista bona sunt, sed unde facias bene, non quae te faciant bonum.*⁸⁸

In both sentiment and rhetorical style the passage recalls Seneca. It is especially reminiscent of Seneca, *De remediis fortuitarum*.⁸⁹ St. Augustine also offers a lengthy exegesis on why the Gospels do not mean what they appear to state on the subject.⁹⁰

Faltonia Betitia Proba provides an example of how one aristocratic convert dealt with the problem of becoming Christian while retaining her wealth. Proba was a member of the illustrious, and wealthy, family of the Petronii and a comparatively early convert in terms of the senatorial aristocracy.⁹¹ She was the author of *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi*, a poem encompassing the creation of the world and the life of Jesus.⁹² Proba has Jesus advise a wealthy young man, who questions him on how to achieve salvation, to learn to treat his wealth with

⁸⁵ Luke, 16.19-31. See also Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 206.

⁸⁶ See Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 205; also pp. 195-196 above.

⁸⁷ ... *diuitiae ut impedimenta in improbis ita in bonis sunt adiumenta uirtutis* (St. Ambrose, *Exp. Ev. Sec. Luc.* VIII. 85); St. Augustine, *Sermo XLVIII.* 8.

⁸⁸ St. Augustine, *Sermo XLVIII.* 8 (*PLL* 38, pp. 319-320).

⁸⁹ See Chapter 4. 8 above.

⁹⁰ St. Augustine, *Ep.* CLVII. iv. 23f (*PLL* 33, p. 686f).

⁹¹ She is thought to have composed her epic in or about the year 362 (Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, pp. 97, 99). Her conversion, then, had taken place somewhat earlier; how much earlier is unclear.

⁹² Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, pp. 1, 97, 118.

contempt.⁹³ This is the proper Stoic stance. In Proba's retelling of the story Jesus does not recommend that the young man dispose of his riches, as recorded in the synoptic gospels.⁹⁴ Proba thus demonstrates how the wealthy could rationalise the retention of their wealth. The fact that she feels the need to address the topic indicates the presence of some feeling of discomfort that must be dealt with.

Proba condemns selfishness, but mentions sharing wealth only with *sui*.⁹⁵ Unlike Hermas she acknowledges no obligation to assist needy fellow Christians, let alone the non-Christian poor. She does, however, recognise the patron's duty of care to his or her clients.⁹⁶ In this is she follows the ancient tradition of patron/client relationships.

Proba appears to be the aristocratic norm rather than the exception in her attitude to wealth and its uses. Nevertheless, there were Christians amongst the nobility who were prepared to sell all they had and give the money to the poor, just as Jesus had instructed.⁹⁷ They faced formidable opposition, and criticism, from family and peers.⁹⁸ The effect of such opposition and criticism should not be lightly dismissed. Jerome was certainly concerned about it.⁹⁹ Peer approval, or disapproval, can be a powerful force.

When Marcella, the widowed daughter of Albina, disposed of much of her property in aid to the poor, Albina took steps to ensure that the bulk of the family's considerable wealth remained

⁹³ *disce, puer, contemnere opes* ... (Proba, *Cento* 522 [Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 72]).

⁹⁴ Matt. 19. 21; Mark 10. 21; Luke 18. 22. Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 120.

⁹⁵ Proba, *Cento* 476 (Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 68). See also Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 119. 'Relatives' (Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 69) and 'kin' (Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 119) are too narrow to encompass the range of *suus*. *OLD* includes in its range of meanings, "those associated with him, his soldiers, companions, followers etc." In this context, then, it refers to those who identify with Proba's interests, including relatives, freed slaves and clients; in the next line of her poem the author condemns patrons who defraud their clients.

⁹⁶ Proba, *Cento* 477 (Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross*, p. 68).

⁹⁷ Mark 10. 21.

⁹⁸ e.g. St. Jerome, *Ep.* CVIII. 5; Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, pp. 278-279.

⁹⁹ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 279.

within the family.¹⁰⁰ Over twenty years later, in the late 360s to early 370s, the conduct of Melania the Elder caused an even greater sensation. She too adopted an ascetic life-style and donated revenue to the Christian Church.¹⁰¹ These women were of Christian families, and their families' objections echoed those of pagans whose Christian relatives wished to follow a similar path.¹⁰² The opposition from pagan kin seems to have been no more strident than that from moderate members of Christian families and follows similar lines: concern for the preservation of family property, continuity of the family line and the desire for advantageous marriage alliances. Such advantages could be social, economic or political, often all three. Aristocratic concern for the proper transfer of property cut across religious lines. The story of Iulia Eustochium illustrates several themes. She, with the support of her mother, Paula, adopted an ascetic lifestyle. Her father's brother and his wife, on the other hand, tried to persuade Iulia to marry. An interesting, and far from unusual, aspect of this family was that although Iulia and her mother were Christian, her uncle was a pagan. His wife's religious allegiance is unclear, but her name, Praetextata, suggests a connection to the family of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus.¹⁰³ The religious adherence of members of aristocratic families is complex and made more so by the gaps in the surviving evidence. No doubt it was less complicated to those most closely involved than it seems to us.

The topic of wealth and its possession is not raised in the correspondence between 'Seneca' and 'St. Paul.' Any pagan aristocrat attracted to Christianity would know of Seneca's ideas on the topic of wealth and would feel at ease with Christian rationalisations that sounded comfortingly familiar. In similar fashion, a Christian persuaded by the correspondence to read Seneca would immediately recognise the similarity between much of his thought and Christian teaching; and not only on the topic of wealth. This would tend to alleviate any anxiety about the possession of wealth, even great wealth, the sort of wealth possessed by the noble families of Rome. The apocryphal letters 'prove' that Seneca had been in close contact with St. Paul who had raised no objection to his wealth. It was so unimportant, in fact, that it is not even mentioned. Seneca was

¹⁰⁰ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 270f.

¹⁰¹ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, pp. 272-273.

¹⁰² Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, pp. 276-277.

¹⁰³ See Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 275f. St. Jerome (*Ep.* CVII.5) hints that she might have been Christian.

renowned for his temperate life-style, St. Jerome himself praising his *contentissima uita*. All this would be reassuring to those Christians unwilling to donate all of their wealth to the poor. This is not to suggest that the anonymous author of the fictitious correspondence had any such idea as he composed his letters. But it would have been comforting to those of his readers who were wealthy and who were concerned about the discomfort caused to their Christian conscience by the retention of their wealth.

6. 5 *Populus Romanus*

It is difficult enough to collect information on members of senatorial families where surviving records are now often incomplete, missing or damaged. It is even more difficult to discover anything about those who occupied humbler positions in Roman society. Little is left to mark the existence of such people, let alone their beliefs, not only in Rome itself, but also throughout the empire. Inscriptions, mostly funerary, do provide valuable first-hand data. These provide such information as family relationships, the upward social mobility of a family by means of the freeborn children of freed slave parents, affection between slave and owner and freed slave and former master. They can also provide clues on the religious adherence of the dead and of their commemorators.¹⁰⁴ Even then, however, the dead, or their commemorators, would have been relatively well-off to have been able to afford a monument of any description. Much of our evidence about the general population is indirect, for example the assessment of a member of the upper orders whose opinions we do have.¹⁰⁵ Reports of popular reaction to the death of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, consul-elect for 385, may serve as illustrations. Praetextatus had begun his career under the Emperor Julian. It was understandable that this pagan emperor should favour a pagan official. His career, however, continued to thrive under a succession of Christian emperors until his own death.¹⁰⁶ Praetextatus also enjoyed the good will of an apparently large proportion of the population of Rome. News of his death led to popular demonstrations of grief in the city.¹⁰⁷ This information comes from his friend and fellow pagan, Symmachus,¹⁰⁸ and so would

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 5. 7 above and Appendix A, pp. 272-273 and 286 below.

¹⁰⁵ See Appendix A. 4 below.

¹⁰⁶ Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 204.

¹⁰⁷ Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 216.

¹⁰⁸ Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 216, note 42.

give rise to justifiable scepticism if it were not confirmed by none other than St. Jerome: ... *ad cuius interitum urbs uniuersa commota est.*¹⁰⁹ Rather than mourn Praetextatus' death, Jerome rejoices. In a letter to Marcella St. Jerome contrasts the post mortem fate of the lady Lea whose earthly life had been ascetic and deliberately humble and, most importantly, Christian, to that of Praetextatus, pagan consul-elect.¹¹⁰ It was bad enough that such a man should gain promotion under a Christian emperor, worse that he was permitted to flaunt his paganism for all to see. The pagan traditions of Praetextatus' procession, *quasi de subiectis hostibus triumpharet*,¹¹¹ was an affront to Jerome's Christian sensibilities. Just as confronting was the number of dignitaries in the procession and the presence, and applause, of a joyful population. It does not mean that all these people, participants and spectators, were necessarily pagan. It was worse if anything if they included Christians. It demonstrated that there were too many "luke-warm Christians."¹¹² This event tells us nothing of the beliefs (or lack of them) of those who grieved for Praetextatus. They need not necessarily have been pagans. Christians, too, mourned the death of this genuinely popular pagan gentleman.¹¹³ Praetextatus had gained the respect and affection of many Roman Christians during his term as *praefectus urbi* in 367. He had handled the violence that had erupted between supporters of the rival candidates for the position of Bishop of Rome with tact and diplomacy.¹¹⁴

Although the consulate was an office of little power compared with the period of the principate, let alone republican times, it was still invested with great prestige and even authority. If it had been otherwise, emperors would not have continued to hold the office. Eugenius, attempting to gain Theodosius' recognition of his assumption of power, made sure to appoint Theodosius as his colleague in the consulship of 393.¹¹⁵ The attempt was in vain. Theodosius' refusal to acknowledge his elevation turned Eugenius from emperor to usurper and was the immediate reason for his decision to court the support of Rome's pagan population, and especially that of

¹⁰⁹ St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXIII. 3 (*CSEL* LIV, p. 213); Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 216 with note 43.

¹¹⁰ St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXIII. 2-3.

¹¹¹ St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXIII. 2.

¹¹² St. Jerome, *Ep.* XXXI. 3 (*CSEL* LIV, p. 251), for example.

¹¹³ Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 204.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 227.

pagan members of the aristocracy. His offer to fund various cults from his own resources, however, was coolly received.¹¹⁶ Lack of money was not the problem. There were enough pagan senators of sufficient means to finance cultic activity.¹¹⁷ Members of the college of *pontifices* supplied the funds to repair the mansion of the *Salii Palatini*, to give but one example.¹¹⁸ The removal of imperial support for cults was less important financially than symbolically. The withdrawal of imperial financial patronage indicated the termination of imperial endorsement,¹¹⁹ the snub aggravated by the diversion of funds to Christianity.

Pagan festivals remained popular, and not only in Rome. It took time for public celebrations of Christianity to be founded and become established. Until then pagan festivals of various descriptions constituted the major part of public entertainment for both pagans and Christians. Some accommodation to Christian sensibilities had been made by the middle of the fourth century. The *Codex Calendar* of 354 indicates that animal sacrifice had been discontinued.¹²⁰ Gladiatorial contests, on the other hand, continued much as they had always done; they were not banned until 404.¹²¹ Many Christians enjoyed the games as much as their pagan neighbours did.¹²²

6. 6 *Contra orationem Symmachi* and the *Carmen contra paganos*

Prudentius describes a Rome where gladiatorial combats were still being held.¹²³ Yet he claims also that *sescentae* of noble families were now Christian and that virtually the entire senate was Christian.¹²⁴ The majority of the general population, too, was Christian, according to Prudentius.¹²⁵ Yet there is something not quite right in his rosy picture. The poet admits the

¹¹⁶ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, pp. 346-347, with note 181.

¹¹⁷ Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, p. 207, with notes 265 and 266.

¹¹⁸ Bloch, 'A New Document,' p. 211.

¹¹⁹ J. F. Matthews, 'Symmachus and the Oriental Cults,' *JRS* 63 (1973), pp. 175-177.

¹²⁰ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 197.

¹²¹ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi*, H. J. Thomson (trans), vol. II, Loeb Classical Library, p. 97.

¹²² St. Augustine, *Confessions* VI. 8. 13.

¹²³ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi* I. 379f, II. 1096f, 1120f.

¹²⁴ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi* I. 566, 574f, 591f.

¹²⁵ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi* I. 580f.

continued existence of *pauca... gentilibus obsita nugis ingenia*.¹²⁶ He is not disturbed, however, because

*pars hominum rarissima clausos
non aperit sub luce oculos et gressibus errat.*¹²⁷

And yet these few aristocrats were able to mount expensive *munera* and this tiny proportion of the population formed a suitable audience. The work is internally inconsistent and is also at odds with the complaint of the anonymous author of the *Carmen contra paganos* who “describes a Rome where paganism is still endemic.”¹²⁸

Prudentius was born in Spain and appears to have spent most of his life there. He did, however, visit Rome on at least one occasion,¹²⁹ probably between 400 and 405.¹³⁰ It is possible that he is describing in his *Contra orationem Symmachi* the situation as he found it on his visit rather than the circumstances that had prevailed some twenty years earlier at the time of the dispute over the altar of Victory, the dramatic date of his work. Barnes and Westall have challenged the dating of the two books of the *Contra orationem Symmachi*.¹³¹ They suggest that a first version of what is now Book II was written about 384 then revised in 402 to 404. Prudentius circulated the revised version, even though it was so long after the controversy, as a demonstration of his rhetorical prowess. Prudentius is optimistic about the successful conversion of the majority of the city’s population while admitting the continuing recalcitrance of too many members of the senatorial aristocracy.

In contrast the depth of indignation shown by the anonymous author of the *Carmen contra paganos* demonstrates his distress at the number of people involved in pagan celebrations as

¹²⁶ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi* I. 574-575.

¹²⁷ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi* I. 591-592.

¹²⁸ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 351.

¹²⁹ Prudentius, *Peristephanon* IX. 3, 105; XI. 1-2; XII.

¹³⁰ Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi*, Thomson (trans), vol. I, Loeb Classical Library, translator’s note a on p. vii.

¹³¹ T. D. Barnes and R. W. Westall, ‘The Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy and Prudentius’ *Contra Symmachum*,’ *Phoenix* XLV (1991): 50-61.

participants and as onlookers.¹³² A wide range of deities was still being acknowledged. Worse, there was nothing secretive or clandestine about these ceremonies. There were processions and other pagan observances conducted in full public view. That is one of the complaints of the poet.

The precise date of the *Carmen* is unclear. It was written either at the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth, the date of composition hinging on the identity of the senator who is its chief target. He might have been Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, who died in 384, Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus, who died in 408, or Nichomachus Flavianus, who died in 394.¹³³ The poem, then, could have been written as early as the 380s or as late as 408. The prefect is traditionally identified as Flavianus;¹³⁴ McLynn opts for Praetextatus.¹³⁵ The *Carmen*, then, might predate Prudentius' poem, or it might have been written a few years afterwards.

The *Carmen* attempts to place all the blame on certain members of the aristocracy; the general populace being exculpated: *ad sac<r>a confugeret populus, quae non habet olim?*¹³⁶ These are "characteristic senatorial follies,"¹³⁷ that, his readers are to believe, attracted a foolishly inquisitive crowd of onlookers who took no active part in proceedings. Their very presence, of course, as passive as it might have been, was in itself a source of encouragement to the actual participants. It was the people who made up such a crowd who were potential targets for the author of the fictitious correspondence supposedly exchanged between Seneca and St. Paul. A belief that Seneca, a Roman aristocrat of the first century, had been a personal friend of St. Paul and himself attracted to Christianity could help convince such people of the (relative) antiquity of Christian tradition. The words of despair in *Ep. XIV* of the correspondence reflect the author's distress at the situation in his own time. Nero's "trusted friends" who will not be persuaded are

¹³² *egregios proceres* (*Carmen contra paganos*, 106 [D. R. Shackelton-Bailey (ed), *Anthologia Latina I. Carmina in codicibus scripta*, fasc 1, *Libri salmasiani aliorumque carmina*, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1982, p. 22]).

¹³³ Croke and Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth Century Rome*, p. 79.

¹³⁴ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 351, with note 201.

¹³⁵ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, pp. 165 and 351, with note 201.

¹³⁶ *Carmen contra paganos* 33.

¹³⁷ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 351.

the aristocratic pagans of his own day.¹³⁸ He is echoing the protests of Prudentius and the author of the *Carmen*.

The letter writer focuses on Rome, but continued pagan observances presented a problem elsewhere in the empire. The letters appeared at end of the fourth century, a time when there was a concerted effort to put an end to pagan worship, the “remnants of idolatry,” in Africa.¹³⁹ The work appeared shortly before official action was undertaken,¹⁴⁰ but demand for such action had been in the air for some time prior to the introduction of legislation. The concern of the Council of Carthage, and its language (*reliquiae idololatriae*), indicate that pagan worship still attracted enough adherents to cause disquiet. Many Christians were affronted by the perseverance of pagan rites, and the apparent reluctance, or inability, of an imperial authority, that was itself Christian, to abolish traditional religious observances, especially in Rome itself.

6.7 The Letter Writer on Roman Christianity

This chapter has dealt so far with the background against which the author of the apocryphal correspondence created his letters. The dramatic events in train when those letters began to circulate have also been mentioned. The present section examines how its anonymous author presents the status of Christianity in Neronian Rome, the dramatic date of his letters. In *Ep. I* he imagines Seneca and Lucilius discussing Christian writing (*apocriphi et alias res*).¹⁴¹ These two are joined by a group of Christians who, by implication, are also of high status. These Christians are described as *quidam disciplinarum tuarum comites*. This phrase suggests that these people are Paul’s fellow Christians although not necessarily converted by him. The letter writer, then, imagines a well-established Christian congregation in Rome that includes, or consists of, men who belonged to the upper strata of Roman society. The letter invites comparison with that of St. Paul to the Romans written at the time that is the dramatic date of Anonymous’ letters. Whereas

¹³⁸ Barlow (ed), *Epistolae*, *Ep. XIV*.

¹³⁹ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* XVIII. 54, with translator’s note 3, p. 89 (William Chase Green [trans], Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann, 1960); Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, p. 265, quoting *Conc. Carth.* V, can. 15.

¹⁴⁰ Between 399 and 401 according to Brown (*Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, p. 265).

¹⁴¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep. I*. See also Chapter 1. 12 above.

the Christian congregation described by the author of the pseudonymous correspondence is a figment of his imagination, that addressed by St. Paul is real.

St. Paul's letter to the Romans addresses an established Christian community, although its members are not of the aristocracy. It is written, like all his letters, in Greek, despite the fact that his scribe bears a Roman name and is corresponding with residents of Rome.¹⁴² The letter makes no mention of the possibility that it might have to be translated for a Latin speaking audience. *Epistle to the Romans* addresses a Greek readership that is largely of eastern origin, if the people to whom Paul sends his personal greetings are representative. Some are Jewish. Aquila and Prisca, for example, are Jewish eastern provincials assimilated to Graeco-Roman culture.¹⁴³ Paul had met them in Corinth after they had left Rome following the Claudian edict of expulsion.¹⁴⁴ He greets Herodion, Andronicus and Junia¹⁴⁵ as fellow Jews.¹⁴⁶ If Paul himself saw no contradiction in being both Jewish and a believer in Christ then it is not difficult to understand how outsiders, especially the authorities, found it impossible to differentiate Jew from Christian. Andronicus and Junia are two others whom he had met in the east and who are now in Rome.¹⁴⁷ These two people had become believers before Paul himself had.¹⁴⁸ Epaenetus, celebrated as the first Christian convert in Asia, has also arrived in Rome.

No Christian congregation in Rome was an apostolic foundation, despite later pious myth to the contrary. At the time of writing his letter to the Romans, St. Paul himself had not yet visited the capital, so could not have formed a Christian group there.¹⁴⁹ If another apostle had been preaching the gospel in Rome it is unlikely that Paul would have praised Roman Christians for

¹⁴² Romans 16. 22.

¹⁴³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 59.

¹⁴⁴ Acts 18. 2f.

¹⁴⁵ This name is doubtful; other readings include 'Junias' and 'Julia'. See the discussion in Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*², note 40 on p. 137, and the slightly longer note in Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, note 39 on pp. 165-166.

¹⁴⁶ St. Paul, Romans 16. 7, 11.

¹⁴⁷ St. Paul, Romans 16. 7-8; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, p. 57 and note 34.

¹⁴⁸ St. Paul, Romans 16. 7.

¹⁴⁹ Romans 1. 13.

their ability to instruct one another.¹⁵⁰ A fourth century writer known as Ambrosiaster provides confirmation.¹⁵¹ He states clearly that Roman Jews became believers despite the absence of an apostle.

*Romanis autem irasci non debuit, sed et laudare fidem illorum: quia, nulla insignia uirtutem uidentes, nec aliquem apostolorum susceperant fidem Christi ritu licet Judaico, in uerbis potius quam in sensu.*¹⁵²

By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Christians of Rome, between A.D. 54 and 59,¹⁵³ probably in the spring of either 55 or 56,¹⁵⁴ but perhaps as early as 54,¹⁵⁵ the Christian community in Rome was already well established. Paul claims that the faith of Rome's Christians "is proclaimed in all the world."¹⁵⁶ If this is to be understood as anything more than the opening civilities usual in the ancient letter, then it is reasonable to assume that the flow of information went in both directions, from Rome and to Rome. Paul had heard of the Roman Christians and they had heard of him. Given the small number at the time of those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah this is not surprising.

It is possible that Anonymous is referring to this history in the first letter of the correspondence. *Ep. I* has Seneca and Lucilius joined by a group of Christians.¹⁵⁷ The implication is that Seneca has been in contact with Roman Christians, has learned something of Christian teaching from them and they have put him in touch with St. Paul. The author pictures the group of unnamed

¹⁵⁰ Romans 15. 14.

¹⁵¹ Little is known of this man. He was probably of aristocratic birth and held various high ranking official posts (Alexander Souter, *A Study of Ambrosiaster*, Texts and Studies contributing to Biblical and Patristic Literature, vol. VII, no. 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905, pp. 175-178). It is thought that he lived in Rome while writing his *Quaestiones* and the commentaries on the letters of St. Paul (Souter, *A Study of Ambrosiaster*, p. 165). He wrote between 366 and 380 (Souter, *A Study of Ambrosiaster*, p. 174).

¹⁵² Ambrosiaster, *Commentarium in epistolam ad Romanos*, prologue 25. 3 (*P. L.* vol. XVII, p. 47).

¹⁵³ John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986, p. 160.

¹⁵⁴ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, revised edition, Howard Clark Kee (trans), London: SCM Press, 1975, p. 311.

¹⁵⁵ Wolfgang Wiefel, 'The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity,' in *The Romans Debate*, p. 93, note 87.

¹⁵⁶ Romans 1. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep. I*. See also p. 59 above.

Christians, with the addition of Seneca and Lucilius, instructing each other, the behaviour for which Paul had praised Rome's real Christians.

This idea should not be pressed too far. The nature of the correspondence is such that its author did not concern himself overmuch, if at all, with the manner in which his protagonists might have met. Nevertheless, readers of the letters who, like Ambrosiaster, knew something of Christianity's beginnings in Rome, could have reached a similar conclusion. The correspondence implies that Seneca already had some acquaintance with Christian thought before his friendship with St. Paul began. A further implication is that he was introduced to Paul by his Christian contacts in Rome. His supposed natural bent towards Christian belief had been strengthened by these contacts and he was then ready for Paul to provide the finishing touches to turn him into a Christian.

*Perpendenti tibi ea sunt reuelata quae paucis diuinitas concessit. Certus igitur ego in agro iam fertili semen fortissimum sero...*¹⁵⁸

*... inreprehensibilem sophiam, quam propemodum adeptus.*¹⁵⁹

6. 8 Anonymous' Portrait of Seneca

The picture of mid-first century Christianity in Rome presented by the pseudonymous correspondence is based on some historical reality. There was a well-established Christian community in Rome, although its members were not of high status. So too the portrait of Seneca in the correspondence is based on reality. Seneca had been tutor to the young Nero and continued as his advisor until falling out of favour.¹⁶⁰ Concentrating on Seneca's role as Nero's *magister*,¹⁶¹ the letter writer expands this role to cover the entire world.¹⁶² Since he brackets *magister* with *ensor sophista* the reader is entitled to infer that Seneca is to teach moral philosophy. This picture, too, can be justified from Seneca's own works. His *Epistulae morales*, although nominally addressed to Lucilius, are guides on how to live an ethical life, according to his

¹⁵⁸ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. XIV.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ See p.112 above.

¹⁶¹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. II.

¹⁶² *magister tanti principis etiam omnium* (Barlow [ed.], *Epistolae*, Ep. II).

interpretation of Stoic philosophy, of course, not according to Christian religious beliefs. In *Ep.* XIV in the apocryphal correspondence P encourages S to become in effect a Christian missionary to Nero and to the members of his household as well as to Rome's ruling orders.¹⁶³ In *Ep.* VII S describes how he has read one of Paul's works to Nero and his court.¹⁶⁴ Our anonymous author had some knowledge of Seneca's career and used his imagination to supply the rest.

There is evidence in the apocryphal letters to show that their author was acquainted with Seneca's philosophical thought. There is, however, insufficient information to judge which of them he had read, whether in unabridged or epitomised form, or whether his information was gleaned only at second-hand, from references in Christian authors, for example.

It has already been noted that the study of Seneca's works, or at least some of them, often formed part of the education curriculum.¹⁶⁵ The author of *Ep.* XI in the apocryphal correspondence lists the usual names as exemplars of tyranny: Alexander the Great, who is not given that name but described as *Macedo*, *Philippi filius*, Cyrus, Darius and Dionysius, with the addition of Gaius Caesar. This is a list that almost any Roman of any period after the death of Gaius could be expected to produce. It is nonetheless striking that the names, with one exception, appear in Seneca's treatise, *De ira*.¹⁶⁶ The exception is Dionysius who, in contrast to the others named, is praised, although briefly, in the essay *De clementia* as *iure meritoque praeferrri multis regibus potest*.¹⁶⁷ Although definitive proof is lacking there is nevertheless circumstantial evidence to indicate that the author of *Ep.* XI had read Seneca's *De ira*. There are sections of this essay that would resonate with a Christian readership. It contains, for example, Seneca's version of the Gospel's admonition to turn the other cheek: *percussit te, recede*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* XIV.

¹⁶⁴ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, *Ep.* VII.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 4. 8 above.

¹⁶⁶ Seneca, *De ira* II. xxxiii. 3, III. xvi. 3-4, xvii, xviii. 3-xix, xxi.1-5.

¹⁶⁷ Seneca, *De clementia* I. xii. 1.

¹⁶⁸ Seneca, *De ira* II. xxxiv. 5.

6. 9 Conclusion

The author of the correspondence knows something of Nero's Rome but views aspects of its Christian community through fourth century lenses. He assumes that there had been Christians in the first century who had belonged to the highest strata of Roman society, as there were in his own time, while noting that there were members of the emperor's entourage who remained untouched by the Christian message:

*eiusque domesticis atque fidis amicis insinuabis, quibus aspera et incapabilis erit persuasio, cum plerique illorum minime flectuntur insinuationibus tuis.*¹⁶⁹

One of the concerns of the author of the fictitious correspondence was to counteract the pagan worship still openly practised in his own time.

There was an obvious danger in the continued existence of pagans in sufficient numbers to support, or perhaps even install, another pagan emperor. Julian's reign, brief as it had been, was alarming in itself and more alarming in its implications for the future. The earliest readers of the correspondence would have seen Eugenius accede to the demands of pagan senators, after some hesitation, it is true, but accede none the less. Eugenius lacked religious fervour. He was Christian and had no intention of emulating Julian's conversion to an enthusiastic paganism. On the other hand he did not allow Christian principle to stand in the way of his ambitions. He needed senatorial support after it became clear that Theodosius regarded him as a usurper. At the same time he did not want to alienate Christian opinion in Rome. It was an uneasy compromise, although perhaps not as uneasy as we might imagine. Ambrose's speech in praise of Valentinian's steadfastness in refusing to restore the altar of Victory claims that the emperor stood alone, opposed by both pagan and Christian courtiers.¹⁷⁰ Pagan and Christian aristocrats had reached an accommodation that was no less powerful for being unspoken. The religious adherence of individuals was less important than their status as members of the empire's ruling class. This accommodation was disturbed as much by enthusiastic Christian asceticism as it was by the reluctance of many aristocrats to convert to Christianity.

¹⁶⁹ Barlow (ed.), *Epistolae*, Ep. XIV.

¹⁷⁰ St. Ambrose, *De obitu Valentiniani* 19. See also pp. 232, 234, 235 above.

Seneca had belonged to the senatorial aristocracy. If it could be demonstrated that he had been touched by the Christian message, then that could only help in the conversion of the contemporary Roman aristocracy, too many of whose members continued to be resolutely pagan. This argument holds regardless of whether the author himself was inspired by this motive or whether someone else was influenced by the same motive to circulate the correspondence.

CONCLUSION

The author of the correspondence allegedly between the younger Seneca and St. Paul created the myth of the friendship between the Stoic and the apostle. He was also the first to claim Seneca for Christianity. There was, nevertheless, a foundation on which he could build. Earlier Latin Christian writers had already noted the compatibility of parts of Seneca's philosophy with Christian belief. The authenticity of the letters was not questioned for many centuries. Christians wanted to believe that Seneca had been at least sympathetic to their religion. It is a hardy myth that still survives.

An unexpected feature of the correspondence is that the teaching is two-way. In fact we do not see St. Paul converting Seneca. We see instead Seneca proposing to instruct Paul in the Latin style appropriate to the profound truths he has to expound.

I have investigated reasons for this Christian 'adoption' of Seneca. There is no one characteristic that was of overriding importance. Christian interest in him was due, rather, to many aspects of his life. Seneca's literary eminence was attractive to Christians sensitive to pagan sneers that their religion attracted only the poor and the ignorant. Some of Seneca's philosophical thought has the appearance of Christian inspiration. This is one factor that attracted the attention of those early Christian authors who wrote in Latin.

Other Christians were probably attracted by Seneca's ascetic life-style, as Jerome was. Of crucial importance was the historical accident that made Seneca and St. Paul close contemporaries. This coincidence means that a meeting between them was within the realms of possibility.

Seneca's manner, and his time, of death were also influential. Nero condemned him to death in the year following the destruction of much of Rome by fire. Immediately after the fire the emperor had launched the first persecution of Christians whom he had had executed as arsonists. An enthusiastic Christian admirer of Seneca could easily link the two unrelated events and conclude that Seneca had been punished for his Christian connections. St. Jerome, who was not a particular admirer of Seneca's philosophy, linked Seneca's death to the martyrdom of St. Peter

and St. Paul as a chronological convenience. Unsophisticated readers, and especially, listeners, could be forgiven for reading more into this timing than Jerome intended.

This thesis has identified another factor in the letter writer's motivation for creating his work. Anonymous wished to convert Paul, a Hellenised Jew, into a Latin-speaking Roman Christian, a Roman, moreover, of high status. I have suggested reasons for the apparent necessity of this attempt. At the end of the fourth century Christianity was the official religion of the Empire. Pagan observances were discouraged, forbidden where possible. Yet despite this up to half of the traditional aristocratic families of Rome itself remained pagan. There was still the need to persuade these recalcitrant nobles who could not easily be coerced. It does seem unlikely that such people would have read the correspondence or, if they did, that they would have been convinced by it. People of more modest educational attainment, similar to that of the letter writer himself, are more likely to have been impressed. Most of those who did read the letters, or had them read to them, were probably already Christian. It is plausible that Christians encouraged their circulation amongst their pagan neighbours.

Our imaginative author has his St. Paul writing to Seneca in Latin. At the end of the fourth century Latin had not long overtaken Greek as the majority language of Rome's Christian communities. Anonymous, however, wants to distance Roman Christianity from its Greek past by demonstrating that Latin was the language of St. Paul. There is no need to teach him to write in Latin, but because his education was *non legitime* there is a need to instruct him in the finer points of rhetoric.

Another aim of these fictional letters is to show that Paul had converted from Judaism to Christianity, to the point of abandoning all Jewish practices. At the time that the letters were being distributed there were still too many Christians who were prepared to acknowledge the authority of the synagogue. This was one reason for St. Augustine's concern about Jerome's decision to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew instead of basing his translation on the Septuagint. St. Jerome had first to learn Hebrew from Jewish scholars. He thus set a poor example to those Christians, whether Jewish or Judaisers, who persisted in attending the synagogue and participating in Jewish festivals. It was difficult to discourage them even though

Jewish leadership on the whole was just as anxious to set the boundaries of Judaism as Christian leaders were to define those of Christianity.

If our anonymous author's chief motive in composing his letters was to convince Christians that Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Stoic philosopher, *amicus Neronis* and the most powerful figure of his time, was a covert Christian sympathiser, perhaps even a secret convert, then he succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

APPENDIX A

Suicide

*Suicide is painless*¹

This appendix contains an account of some attitudes towards suicide during the period of time covered by the thesis. These attitudes shed further light on the way in which Seneca was regarded by Christians of the time. The appendix form has been chosen since the topic is not directly related to the central text.

Seneca was a prominent suicide, the relevance of whose death has been much discussed. He has been accused of “being in love with death.”² Rist has expressed his astonishment at Seneca’s high standing amongst early Christians, given his opinion on suicide.³ Such a response reflects a modern perception that the ancient world did not necessarily share. This appendix examines some ancient views on suicide. It investigates Seneca’s sentiments on the subject in the context of his own society and of Roman law. It asks whether his views on the topic differed from those of earlier Stoics. The appendix also explores early Christian ideas on the ethical problems posed by the taking of one’s own life. It argues that Seneca’s views on suicide would not have outraged most Christians during the centuries before St. Augustine’s rejection of the option of suicide entered Church law. The contrast was, for a long period, not as stark as might be expected. For centuries Christian and pagan shared a similar range of attitudes towards suicide. Even in the time of St. Augustine “the situation was by no means so clear as Augustine wanted it to be, and as it subsequently became.”⁴ The problem is one that has been perceived, and perhaps conceived, by modern writers. It is worth examining if only to differentiate modern attitudes from ancient opinion.

The Christian Church has prohibited suicide for so long that it is easy to disregard the fact that this was not always so. It took several centuries for suicide to be forbidden by Christian authority. Until the middle of the fifth century Christian views on suicide were as diverse as

¹ Theme from *M*A*S*H*. Lyrics by Mark Altman, music by Johnny Mandel.

² J. M Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 249. This opinion is challenged in Chapter 3. 3.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 65.

those of the Roman Empire's non-Christian population. Some Christians actively sought death as voluntary martyrs. Other Christians opposed such tendencies and tried to persuade their co-religionists that there were other ways of bearing witness than a dramatic and gory public death. St. Augustine was the first to develop a Christian theory of suicide. He was opposed to suicide under almost all circumstances,⁵ but his view was by no means general amongst Christians at the time, although it was to prevail. His contemporary, St. Jerome, for example, applauded, even demanded, suicide under certain circumstances.⁶

A. 1 Suicide and Roman Law

Roman law regarded neither suicide nor attempted suicide as a crime. No action was taken against a failed suicide. There was no legal theory that the individual's life was the property of the state, except in the special case of the military. Even here the offence was not attempted suicide, it was desertion. The penalty, paradoxically, was death.⁷ If however, the motive was deemed acceptable, capital punishment was not exacted.

The manner of suicide counted for more than the fact of suicide. Some methods of committing suicide were considered to be shameful, rather than the actual act of self-killing.⁸ Roman law, for example, regarded hanging as an unworthy means of self-inflicted death. In the legal opinions of the jurists the motive for suicide assumed major importance.

*sic autem hoc distinguitur, interesse qua ex causa quis sibi mortem consciuit.*⁹

Those who committed suicide because of a guilty conscience were not considered worthy of being mourned; they were bracketed with traitors, enemies of the state and *suspendiosi*.

*non solent autem lugeri ... hostes uel perduellionis damnati nec suspendiosi nec qui manus sibi intulerunt, non taedio uitae, sed mala conscientia.*¹⁰

Durkheim believes that this clause applied to suicides in general.¹¹ It appears rather to equate those who choose to hang themselves, rather than all who kill themselves, with traitors and with

⁵ Note the qualification: "almost all circumstances." See section 5 below, for further discussion.

⁶ See pp. 279-280 below.

⁷ *Digest* 48. 19. 38. 12 (Paul).

⁸ Anton J. L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-killing in Classical Antiquity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p.165.

⁹ *Digest* 48. 21. 3. 6 (Marcianus).

¹⁰ *Digest* 3. 2. 11. 3 (Ulpian).

a national enemy. Included amongst those guilty of infamy are those who commit suicide because of a guilty conscience. Hanging oneself seems to have been regarded as an admission of guilt. An inscription from Umbria concerning a burial plot demonstrates the same prejudice from another level of society.¹² The local philanthropist will not allow disreputable people such as *auctorati* and *quei sibi [la]queo manu(m) attulissent* to be interred in the cemetery that he intends to donate to his community.¹³ Death by hanging was as disgraceful as a Roman citizen's selling himself to a gladiatorial school. Those who killed themselves after due consideration and for the correct motive were not expected to choose this method. This ties in with Artemidorus' observations¹⁴ and with various sections of the *Digest*.

Ulpian wrote that a will was rendered invalid by suicide only if the testator killed himself to avoid condemnation.¹⁵ Otherwise an individual's life was his own, to dispose of as and when he thought fit and for any reason: *...taedio uitae uel ualetudinis aduersae inpatientia uel iactationis, ut quidam philosophi...*¹⁶ Van Hooff believes that only *iactatio* refers to *quidam philosophi*.¹⁷ It could also be the case, however, that Ulpian is noting other reasons for ending one's life put forward by various philosophies. In the first century A.D. the law appears to have been different. During Tiberius' reign, according to Tacitus, the condemned forfeited their property and were forbidden burial.¹⁸ Those who killed themselves before they were condemned were rewarded by burial and by the recognition of their wills.¹⁹

¹¹ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide. A Study in Sociology*, John A. Spalding and George Simpson (trans.), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952, p. 331.

¹² *CIL* 11. 6528.

¹³ An *auctoratus* was a Roman citizen who had sold himself to a gladiatorial school (Ettore de Ruggiero, *Dizionario Epigrafico di Antichità Romane*).

¹⁴ See p.272 below

¹⁵ *Digest* 28. 3. 6. 7 (Ulpian, *Sabinus* Book 10).

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Anton J. L van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-killing in Classical Antiquity*, London and New York: Routledge. 1990, p. 189.

¹⁸ *et quia damnati publicatis bonis sepultura prohibebantur, eorum qui de se statuebant humabantur corpora, manebant testamenta, pretium festinandi* (Tacitus, *Annals* VI. 29).

¹⁹ *ibid.*

There was no specific crime of suicide in Roman law.²⁰ Self-killing is dealt with only in connection with various offences. Religious sanctions were also absent. Suicides were not denied burial at certain sites nor, conversely, was it required that they be buried in specific places. St. Augustine himself did not recommend that the body of anyone who had suffered a self-inflicted death should be treated differently, denied Christian burial rites, for example. He apparently believed that the danger to the soul was sufficient as both deterrent and punishment. Moreover, as we shall see, his ban on suicide was not absolute. Killing oneself was permissible at God's command. This is not very different from the attitude of the Stoa, which also held that the *sapiens* would recognise a divine message to end his life. Stoicism lacked the Christian belief in an after-life of eternal bliss. There is no record of a Stoic anticipating his own demise with the same fervour as did some of the Christian martyrs. Not that some Stoics did not knowingly indulge in risky behaviour by which they seemed deliberately to court death as much as any overly enthusiastic Christian martyr. Helvidius Priscus provides the perfect example. He baited Vespasian until that most phlegmatic of emperors turned on his tormentor and condemned him to death.²¹ It is inconceivable that Helvidius did not appreciate the risk he was taking.

A. 2 Defining Suicide

‘Suicide’ is a loaded word that embodies a loaded concept, often bound up with moral disapproval and/or the assumption of mental pathology.²² In this discussion no pejorative overtones are intended. ‘Suicide’ is employed in the sense given in the Macquarie Dictionary, Federation Edition, rather than that of older definitions that provide synonyms like ‘self-murder.’ Durkheim’s definition has limited application to the society of ancient Rome.²³ Despite its difficulties the English term is too useful to be abandoned.²⁴ I apply the word ‘suicide’ to those deaths in which the individual makes a deliberate decision to die. I include instances where the person wanting to die persuades or provokes another into performing the actual deed.

²⁰ Tarquinius Priscus crucified the bodies of suicides (Pliny, *N.H.* XXXVI. xxiv. 107). Note, however, that this is in the context of enforced public labour. The people were too exhausted to continue but the king needed his labour force and could not afford to lose workers. The episode bears the hallmarks of legend.

²¹ Suetonius, *Vespasian* XV.

²² Timothy Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors and Self in Roman Thought and Literature*, New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 1-2.

²³ Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors*, pp. 6-7.

²⁴“In practice, however, the term is indispensable” (Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors*, p. 11).

Those sentenced to death but permitted to choose their own method present a problem of classification. Seneca's death will serve as an example. He had been condemned to death by Nero, but, as an aristocrat, was granted the *liberum mortis arbitrium*.²⁵ It was the choice of *how* to die, not whether or when. Seneca himself recognised the difference when he praised his wife who chose to die with him, although she had not been sentenced to death: "*claritudinis plus in tuo fine.*"²⁶ He regarded Pompeia as more meritorious than himself, as she was able to act according to her own will, rather than at the behest of another. His freedom to act was confined to which method to choose. He did not heed his own advice that it is folly to anticipate the executioner.²⁷ St. Jerome records that *a Nerone interfectus est*.²⁸ Jerome's choice of words implies that Nero was responsible for Seneca's death.

There are other instances that are equally ambiguous. Is it suicide, for example, to provoke the authorities in a way that would be almost certain to end in the death penalty? Here motive is crucial. If the intention of the agent is to attempt to force the authorities to change the law, then should such an action still be counted as suicide? Various Christian martyr stories could serve as examples. One incident will suffice. Eusebius tells the story, with obvious approval, of the young men who demanded that the proconsul condemn them as well as those Christians actually on trial, since they also were Christian.²⁹ Did they wish to demonstrate their eagerness to die for their faith? That surely must count as suicide. But what if the motive was to show the magistrate how many people he would have to execute for the same crime? That might not only save the lives of those actually on trial, it could possibly, in the long run, bring official acceptance to Christianity. In other words they were risking their lives in the hope of a good outcome, not only for those already condemned, but for all Christians. This was, after all, not a completely vain hope. About the year 112 Pliny in Bithynia had been sufficiently alarmed by the number of Christians potentially at risk of the death penalty to apply to Trajan for guidelines on how to deal with the situation.³⁰ Trajan's reply is a masterpiece of Roman pragmatism: *conquirendi non*

²⁵ Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors*, p. 7.

²⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 63.

²⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 10; Chapter 3. 3.

²⁸ St. Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

²⁹ Eusebius, *The Martyrs of Palestine* 3. 2-4 (both recensions).

³⁰ Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 9.

sunt.³¹ In other words the practice of Christianity was regarded as a criminal activity but its adherents were to be left in peace as long as they did nothing to draw attention to themselves.

There is one piece of evidence to support a similar interpretation on another occasion. *The Martyrs of Lyons* tells the story of a young man named Vettius Epagathus, who was arrested when he attempted to defend his fellow Christians.³² According to the author, Vettius was a distinguished man who presumably expected to be given a hearing. Whatever influence he had hoped to wield, his attempt was in vain. He was asked if he were also a Christian and when he admitted as much he too was arrested. The text states plainly that Vettius died in defence of his fellow Christians.³³ Here, then, the stated motive for a martyr's actions is not a primary longing for martyrdom but a desire to save others. It must be acknowledged that this could be an example of the reworking of an original text at a later time when over zealous martyrs were no longer universally admired.³⁴ If this is so, then it demonstrates that Christians came, in time, to regard such martyrdoms as suspect.

A. 3 Suicide and the Stoa

Although the Stoa generally agreed that suicide was a valid option, the circumstances varied under which that option should be exercised. Zeno committed suicide when he felt his powers failing. Chrysippus felt that disease and mutilation were sufficient reasons to end one's life.³⁵ Seneca held that the extreme frailty of old age provided a sufficient reason for at least considering suicide.³⁶ In fact, Seneca wondered, should one arrange to die a little before this time, in case physical infirmity made action impossible at the more appropriate time?³⁷ Cicero provides evidence that this idea did not originate with Seneca.

³¹ Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 2.

³² *The Martyrs of Lyons* 9-10.

³³ *The Martyrs of Lyons* 10.

³⁴ Herbert Musurillo (ed. and trans.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: 1972, pp. liv-lvii. See also the stories of St. Agathonicê on p. 277 below.

³⁵ Plutarch, *Moralia* 1069E, 1076B. It should be noted that, according to Plutarch, this applies only to the sage and, as he points out, such a person does not exist and has never existed (*Moralia* 1076B).

³⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* XXX. 2.

³⁷ *Plurimum enim refert, uitam aliquis extendat an mortem... Et fortasse paulo ante quam debebit, faciendum est, ne cum fieri debebit, facere non possis* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 34).

*et saepe officium est sapientis desciscere a uita cum sit beatissimus, si id opportune facere possit.*³⁸

Seneca does not mention an obvious source of assistance always readily available to the wealthy Roman, household slaves. A Roman slave owner could, at least in theory, command a slave to kill him;³⁹ the Emperor Nero was assisted to die by one of his freedmen. It is possible that Seneca was sensitive to the traditional penalty prescribed for the entire slave household if one of their number murdered their master and was therefore reluctant to suggest their employment in such a case.⁴⁰

In another letter Seneca describes the death of one Tullius Marcellinus, a man apparently well known to his correspondent.⁴¹ This anecdote illustrates another aspect of Roman suicide, its often public nature. Tullius Marcellinus called together many of his friends to discuss his condition and to seek advice on how to end his life.⁴² According to Seneca, however, Marcellinus did not require advice so much as help; his slaves had refused to obey him.⁴³ Their refusal was possibly due to affection for their master, more probably because of fear for their own safety. They too must have been aware of the prescribed penalty for the murder of a master by one of his slaves. None of the friends called in for consultation offered to help him die. Instead, the Stoic, *homo egregius et... uir fortis ac strenuus*,⁴⁴ convinced the slaves that the *familia* would not be at risk when it was known that the *dominus* wanted to die.⁴⁵ More remarkably, he declared that preventing one's master from killing himself was just as serious an offence as murdering him.⁴⁶ Whether the law would have agreed with this unnamed Stoic is an

³⁸ Cicero, *De finibus* III. 61.

³⁹ See below.

⁴⁰ The traditional penalty called for the execution of all the household slaves, regardless of age or opportunity (Tacitus, *Annals* XIV. 43).

⁴¹ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 5 - 9.

⁴² Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 5.

⁴³ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 7.

⁴⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 6.

⁴⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 7.

⁴⁶ *alioqui tam mali exempli esse occidere dominum quam prohibere* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 7).

interesting question.⁴⁷ As it turned out, there was no need for bloodshed. Marcellinus abstained from food and lay in a hot bath until he died.⁴⁸

Seneca himself would not commit suicide merely to escape old age, unless his mental faculties were impaired, nor to escape pain, provided the pain was not incurable.⁴⁹ Not because he feared that he would be unable to bear pain, but because it would inevitably compromise his very reason for living. Seneca was far more concerned with the quality of his life than its length.

*Non enim uiuere bonum est, sed bene uiuere. Itaque sapiens uiuit, quantum debet, non quantum potest.*⁵⁰

Durkheim claims that Stoicism taught a detachment that readily leads to suicide.⁵¹ This appears to be a misunderstanding of the doctrine of ἀπάθεια. Seneca himself feared that this doctrine was all too often misinterpreted and that there were those who confused the Stoa with Cynicism. He sets out the Stoic position. The Stoic *sapiens* recognises his problems and overcomes them while the Cynic is not even aware of them.⁵² The Stoic *sapiens* is self-sufficient, certainly, but he is not by nature solitary. He prefers to have friends and neighbours.⁵³ This is a preference rather than a necessity. The *sapiens* can survive without them if he must.⁵⁴ The Stoa, moreover, has a social conscience. No other school is as gentle or as concerned for the common good.⁵⁵ It is the duty of Stoics to serve others and not only themselves.⁵⁶ Nor does the practice of the Stoa from its very beginnings support a claim of separation from ordinary life. Zeno and his immediate

⁴⁷ On this point see *Digest* 29. 5. 1. 22 (Ulpian), also Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 3. 9.

⁴⁸ Seneca, *Ep.* LXXVII. 9.

⁴⁹ *non relinquam senectutem... at si coeperit concutere mentem, si partes eius conuellere, si mihi non uitam reliquerit, sed animam, prosiliam ex aedificio putri ac ruenti. morbum morte non fugiam, dumtaxat sanabilem nec officientem animo. non adferam mihi manus propter dolorem; sic mori uinci est. hunc tamen si sciero perpetuo mihi esse patiendum, exhibo, non propter ipsum, sed quia impedimento mihi futurus est ad omne, propter quod uiuitur* (Seneca, *Ep.* LVIII. 35-36).

⁵⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX. 4-5.

⁵¹ Durkheim, *Suicide*, p. 281.

⁵² *noster sapiens uincit quidem incommodum omne, sed sentit; illorum ne sentit quidem* (Seneca, *Ep.* IX. 3).

⁵³ Seneca, *Ep.* IX. 3.

⁵⁴ *... quae si desunt, non desiderat, non deesse mauult* (Seneca, *Ep.* IX. 5).

⁵⁵ *sed nulla secta benignior leniorque est, nulla amantior hominum et communis boni attentior...* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 3).

⁵⁶ *... ut propositum sit usui esse et auxilio nec sibi tantum, sed uniuersis singulisque consulere* (Seneca, *De clem.* II. v. 3).

successors taught in plain view in a public place, the Stoa Poikile, which fronted directly onto the Athenian agora.⁵⁷ Chrysippus continued to carry out the normal activities of an Athenian citizen into old age.⁵⁸

Zeno preached involvement in, rather than detachment from, public life, although he himself apparently did not seek office.⁵⁹ He also approved of honouring parents and brothers,⁶⁰ and advocated marriage and the rearing of children.⁶¹ This is hardly a doctrine of disengagement from life. Admittedly Diogenes Laertius claims that these are the actions of a σοφός but surely they must also have been advised for those seeking that status. Seneca believed so. He put great store in the power of example.

*cogita, quantum nobis exempla bona prosint; scies magnorum uirorum non minus praesentiam esse utilem quam memoriam.*⁶²

Tradition has it that Zeno committed suicide, although the different stories of the method he is supposed to have used do give rise to suspicion. One tradition has it that he held his breath until he died.⁶³ This method is unlikely to succeed. Given that he might have had sufficient self-control to stop breathing while he remained conscious (the point of the story appears to be to illustrate Zeno's control over himself),⁶⁴ when he lapsed into unconsciousness the autonomic nervous system would automatically resume respiration. If his heart were already compromised in some way there is the possibility that the strain was too great and that he died of heart failure. Another tradition preserved by Diogenes Laertius has Zeno starve himself to death.⁶⁵ This is a more credible story that still demonstrates Zeno's self-control.

⁵⁷ Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, Alan Shapiro (trans), Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1995, p. 95.

⁵⁸ Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, pp. 97, 101.

⁵⁹ Seneca, *De tranq. an.* I. 10.

⁶⁰ D. L. VII. 120.

⁶¹ D. L. VII. 121.

⁶² Seneca, *Ep.* CII. 30.

⁶³ D. L. VII. 28.

⁶⁴ This was a matter of supreme importance for Stoics, more significant than a mere description of an original way of killing oneself.

⁶⁵ D. L. VII. 31.

If Zeno failed to practise what he preached with regard to public office, the same cannot be said of later Stoics, especially those of imperial Rome. Panaetius took part in a Rhodian embassy to Rome⁶⁶ and was well versed in politics.⁶⁷ Both Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus carried out the duties expected of a Roman senator as

*ciuis, senator, maritus, gener, amicus, cunctis uitae officii aequabilis, opum contemptor, recti peruicax, constans aduersus metus.*⁶⁸

Musonius Rufus remained an *eques* so did not have a senatorial career, but he, too, took part in public affairs when called upon to do so.⁶⁹

Two Stoics became rulers of the Roman Empire: Marcus Aurelius, officially, as Emperor, Lucius Annaeus Seneca the Younger, unofficially, as de facto co-regent for the youthful Nero.

Tacitus' account lends no support to Bowersock's picture of "Seneca committing suicide in his bath when he realized he would be unable to control the excesses of Nero."⁷⁰ The time to die for that motive was when he learned of Nero's first and unsuccessful attempt to murder Agrippina or when the death of his colleague, Burrus, left him isolated and powerless. Instead he became an accessory after the fact to the murder of the emperor's mother. Burrus' death forced him into retirement, not suicide. He died only when condemned to death by Nero on suspicion of involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy. In Tacitus' version of events Seneca died with exemplary courage. In the more hostile account of Cassius Dio his end was less impressive, although Dio does agree with Tacitus that Seneca was condemned to death.

⁶⁶ L. R. Lind, 'The Tradition of Roman Moral Conservatism', in Carl Deroux (ed), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* I, Collection Latomus, vol. 164, Brussels: Latomus, 1979, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Cicero, *De re publica* I. xxi. 34.

⁶⁸ Tacitus, *The Histories* IV. 5.

⁶⁹ Tacitus, *The Histories* III. 81; IV. 40.

⁷⁰ G. W Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 64. Bowersock's overall argument is, however, compelling. The example of the heroic death, like that of Seneca, combined with the opportunity for dramatic public display offered by the popularity of spectacles in the arena, was an irresistible attraction to those who wished to demonstrate their faith in a peculiarly Roman manner. It is no surprise to find that sometimes the authorities could also recognise this. They belonged to the same world. Thus we find some magistrates refusing to play the parts allotted to them and thwarting the intention of the would-be martyrs before them (see pp. 273-274 below).

A. 4 Other Pagan Opinion

The Roman Empire covered a wide geographic area and a long time span. It ruled many different peoples who held disparate beliefs. Even the tip of the iceberg that has left traces of its existence, let alone its beliefs, regarded suicide in different ways depending on circumstance. These circumstances varied according to the philosophical and/or religious outlook of the commentator as well as the expressed or perceived motives of the suicide. Artemidorus for example, states that only those who hang themselves are not called upon by their relatives at the meals given for the dead.⁷¹ Artemidorus is quite specific; it is those who hang themselves who are not commemorated, not necessarily those who kill themselves in some other fashion.⁷² The provenance of this custom is unclear. Artemidorus claims to have listened to the diviners in the market place, those who are despised and dismissed as charlatans (presumably by the members of his own class).⁷³ It is usually the men of the literate elite whose opinions survive. We so rarely hear a voice from the vast majority of the population of Graeco-Roman antiquity that it is tempting to suggest that Artemidorus has recorded and preserved traces of popular beliefs. Perhaps he did and perhaps this is one of them.

A portion of the silent majority has left traces of its existence in the form of inscriptions. One such sets out the rules of a *collegium*, including the members' burial rights.⁷⁴ It states that *quisquis ex quacumque causa mortem sibi adsciuerit, eius ratio funeris non habebitur*.⁷⁵ It is as though members feared that somehow the club's provisions would be exploited by any of their

⁷¹ Artemidorus, *Oneirocriticon* I. 4.

⁷² ἀναρτήσας ἑαυτὸν ἐτελεύτησε τὸν βίον...(Artemidorus, *Oneirocriticon* I. 4. 7). Plutarch's *Life of Antony* 70. 4 preserves the inscription supposedly written on the tomb of Timon, Athens' notorious misanthrope.

ἐνθάδ' ἀπορρήξας ψυχὴν βαρυδαίμονα κεῖμαι.

τόνῳμα δ' οὐ πεύσεσθε, κακοὶ δὲ κακῶς ἀπόλοισθε.

The inscription could be interpreted as evidence of the terror of the living for the curse of a suicide, a terror that would lead to his being buried anonymously and separated from the worthier dead and that such a grave was a place of danger for the living. It seems to me, however, that this is another anecdote told of a man who seemed to attract almost as many such tales as the equally notorious Diogenes the Cynic. The point of the story is that Timon remained as unsociable in death as he had been in life. His grave was isolated (by natural forces), as he would have wished, and the inscription, which he reputedly composed himself, merely recorded what he would have said to the passer-by had he been able. The epitaph by Callimachus in general circulation reinforces the point:

Τίμων μισάνθρωπος ἐνοικέω. ἀλλὰ πάρελθε,

οὐ μῶξιεν εἶπας πολλὰ πάρελθε μόνον.

⁷³ ...σφόδρα διαβεβλημένων τῶν ἐν ἀγορᾷ μάντεων...(Artemidorus, *Oneirocriticon* I. pr).

⁷⁴ *CIL* 14. 2112.

⁷⁵ *CIL* 14. 2112, line 5, right hand side.

number who decided to commit suicide. It is similar to modern life insurance policies that prohibit payment if the insured are found to have killed themselves. The *collegium* does not deny proper burial to a member who has brought about his own death. It merely refuses to pay for it. The context of this provision is neutral. It is just one more rule that members are expected to observe.⁷⁶

A. 5 Some Early Christian Views

Christianity now forbids suicide. Until well into the twentieth century there were sanctions imposed on those who succeeded, as well as on those who failed. The prohibition is of such antiquity that it is easy to forget that it was not always so.

Christian opinion on suicide before St. Augustine's ruling was endorsed by the Council of Arles reflected the diversity of non-Christian thought. Like St. Jerome and unlike St. Augustine, Eusebius approves of the mother and her two daughters who drown themselves rather than submit to rape.⁷⁷ There is no word of censure for Origen's desire to be martyred; if anything there is approval for his ambition to emulate his father who had suffered martyrdom.⁷⁸ Nor is there any hint of disapproval of St. Ignatius' longing for death, yet Ignatius went so far as to instruct the faithful in Rome to make no effort to rescue him.⁷⁹ It is outside the scope of this study to investigate how, or indeed if, the Christian community could have brought any influence to bear on the authorities or whether it had either the means or the contacts to engineer his escape, by bribery for example.⁸⁰

It was common practice for magistrates to do all in their power to persuade those desirous of martyrdom to reconsider their decision, even granting a stay of execution to allow time for

⁷⁶ Beryl Rawson and van Hooff suggest different interpretations. van Hooff (*From Autothanasia to Suicide*, p. 166) writes that a taboo is indicated here. Suicides, as "audacious dead", disturb the peace of other dead. Beryl Rawson comments that in this context suicide is considered "rather unrespectable" (personal communication).

⁷⁷ Eusebius, *H. E.* VIII.12. 3-4.

⁷⁸ Eusebius, *H.E.* VI. 2. 12.

⁷⁹ Eusebius, *H. E.* III. 36; Ignatius, *Rom.* 2.1.

⁸⁰ See William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch. A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Helmut Koester (ed.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 168-169.

reflection.⁸¹ There are many possible reasons for this display of patience on the part of some Roman magistrates. Perhaps the number of Christians appearing before them was so great as to cause alarm.⁸² It was no part of a governor's duty to order a wholesale slaughter of the local population. Perhaps, as so many *Acta Martyrum* claim, magistrates were often moved by some aspect of the defendant, his youth or the fact that she was a young mother with an infant at the breast.⁸³ Seneca provides a philosophical underpinning for such an attitude: *alterius aetate prima motus sum, alterius ultima*.⁸⁴ Or perhaps accumulated experience over (eventually) centuries confirmed what Pliny had found, that many who claimed to be Christian were relatively easily dissuaded.⁸⁵ Not all Christians were eager to end their lives. It is not surprising that some found their faith was not up to the test:

διὰ τοῦτα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐπαινοῦμεν τοὺς προσιόντας ἑαυτοῖς.⁸⁶

According to the writer of *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, a Christian Phrygian named Quintus surrendered voluntarily to the authorities and then lost courage when confronted by the wild animals.⁸⁷ Eusebius uses this story to warn against a foolhardy eagerness for self-sacrifice.⁸⁸ It is not so much that he disapproves of voluntary martyrdom, more that the would-be martyr must be confident of his ability to hold firm.

Quintus was an exaggerated example of a problem faced by Christian leaders, at least in North Africa, after an outbreak of persecution. There were some who buckled under the threat of torture and death. When the threat eased some of these people repented of their failure and

⁸¹ e.g. *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, 3, 9; *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, esp. 13; *The Martyrdom of the Saintly and Blessed Apostle Apollonius, also called Sakkeas*, esp. 10; Tertullian, *Ad. Scap.* 4. See also Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Hammondsworth: Viking, 1986, p. 421 and G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?' *Past and Present* 26 (1963), p. 13.

⁸² Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 9.

⁸³ *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 6. Pliny also suggests that a defendant's age may be taken into consideration. *nec mediocriter haesitavi, si ne aliquod discrimen aetatum, an quamlibet teneri nihil a robustioribus differant* (Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 2). Suetonius (*Domitian XII*) implies that great age is worthy of respect.

⁸⁴ Seneca, *De clem.* I. i. 4.

⁸⁵ Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 5-7, 10.

⁸⁶ *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* 4.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Eusebius, *H. E.* XV. 7-8.

sought re-admission to the Christian community. The question of how to deal with these penitent apostates troubled Cyprian and his contemporaries.⁸⁹

There was an argument that Christians should not offer themselves up voluntarily, although if arrested they must confess their faith. A Christian might have to accept a violent death forced on him, but he must not seek it.⁹⁰ Christians were cautioned also against stirring up trouble that might attract official attention.⁹¹ Some church leaders forbade voluntary martyrdom.⁹² Towards the end of the third century Clement of Alexandria maintained that the person who offered himself to the authorities was almost as guilty as they were.⁹³ If he actually provoked violence against himself he was equally culpable and must be prepared to be judged so by God.⁹⁴ Bowersock points to the space Clement devotes to the discussion of this problem as a measure of the importance he attached to it and perhaps also of the widespread nature of this enthusiasm for suicidal martyrdom.⁹⁵

Clement put theory into practice. During the Severan persecution of 202 he left Alexandria and never returned.⁹⁶ He was obeying Matthew 10. 23: “when they persecute you in this city, flee to another.” Boyarin terms this a good rabbinic position.⁹⁷ Clement’s actions are in contrast to Tertullian’s opinion. In Tertullian’s eyes martyrdom offered the one sure road to salvation. To Clement, martyrdom was only one means and was not to be actively sought, let alone provoked.⁹⁸

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, expressed similar views to those of Clement:

⁸⁹ For example, St. Cyprian, *Epp.* 15-22; 24-27, 55.4ff; 57.1-3.

⁹⁰ Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, p. 71.

⁹¹ *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* 4; *et cum disciplina prohibeat nostra ne quis se ultro offerat...* (*The Acts of St. Cyprian* 1. 5); *nec quisquam uestrum... ultro se Gentibus offerat* (St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 81. 1. 4)

⁹² de Ste. Croix ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’ p. 21.

⁹³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* IV. x.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, p. 71.

⁹⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God. Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 63.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

“... we should flee when we are persecuted... and not rashly tempt the Lord, but should wait... until the appointed time of death arrive...”⁹⁹ This attitude echoes Stoic thought. Each person has his post assigned by god and must stand fast until given the order to retreat.¹⁰⁰ Here is a convergence of opinion between Roman authority and church leadership. Neither desired a wholesale slaughter of Christians. It was no part of a governor’s brief to provoke the local population into armed resistance to Roman rule as could possibly happen if large enough numbers of people were executed. From the church’s point of view it has little to do with a prohibition on suicide. Such a prohibition did not yet exist. Christian leaders had no desire to lose their flock, nor to frighten away possible new members. A religion that one must die for, as opposed to being willing to die for if necessary, is less likely to attract converts. Martyrs were problematic also in that they could supply another focus of authority during the period between sentence and death.¹⁰¹ Christian leadership in the first centuries already had to deal with the challenges posed by those of their followers with an inclination to turn to Jewish authority.

Some martyrdoms can be classified as suicides. Durkheim’s late nineteenth century work on suicide deals with similar cases. The person who deliberately commits a capital crime, knowing the penalty is execution, is accounted a suicide.¹⁰² Those early Christians who gave themselves up voluntarily apparently did so in the expectation of the blissful after-life they were confident would follow their death.¹⁰³

It is difficult even to guess how many martyrs were suicidal.¹⁰⁴ Surviving literary evidence, chiefly *Acta Martyrum* and letters, is sparse and epigraphic evidence is generally

⁹⁹ Ramsay MacMullen, and Eugene N. Lane (edd), *Paganism and Christianity. 100-425 C.E. A Sourcebook*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, no. 18. 6, pp. 223-224.

¹⁰⁰ Epictetus I. ix. 16, xxix. 28f; III. 24. 98-101. P. A. Brunt, ‘Marcus Aurelius and the Christians,’ in Carl Deroux (ed), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* I, Collection Latomus vol. 164, Brussels: Latomus, 1979, p. 486.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, St. Cyprian, *Epp.* 15, 21, 27; G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. I, Ancient Christian Writers, The Works of the Fathers in Translation, no. 43, New York: Newman Press, 1984, pp. 269f, 354f; and especially St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 23, with Clarke’s commentary, p. 340f.

¹⁰² Durkheim’s example is the crime of treason (Durkheim, *Suicide*, p. 42).

¹⁰³ Durkheim, *Suicide*, p. 227.

¹⁰⁴ Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, pp. 2-3.

uninformative.¹⁰⁵ The martyrdom of St. Agathonicê provides a case study. There are two versions of her story, one in Greek, the other in Latin.¹⁰⁶ The earlier Greek version has Agathonicê throw herself voluntarily into the fire that consumes Carpus.¹⁰⁷ There is no mention of her appearance before the magistrate. In the Latin recension, however, Agathonicê is brought before the proconsul with Carpus and Pamfilius.¹⁰⁸ She too is sentenced to death.¹⁰⁹ In the Greek recension Agathonicê is a bystander who elects to die in answer to “a call from heaven.”¹¹⁰ Like Vettius she appears to have been a voluntary martyr whose story is later altered when such behaviour was no longer widely admired.¹¹¹

The martyrs who died in the arena did not use violence against themselves, but did sometimes provoke violence. Not all did so; many died because they could not obey the commands of Roman officials that would, according to their beliefs, have ended their hope of everlasting life. Such people inhabit a grey area in terms of the definition used in this enquiry. They could have saved their lives by obeying official directives to offer reverence to the image of the emperor and the gods of Rome.¹¹² From the Christian point of view it was not suicidal to risk ending a brief earthly existence rather than jeopardise an eternal after life. Here is another and unexpected coincidence with Seneca’s thought. He believed that death is preferable to life if continuing to live involves being forced into actions incompatible with *uirtus*. His concept of what comprises *uirtus* naturally differs from that of the Christian martyrs.

There were some Christians who deliberately courted arrest. During a governor’s assize in Asia a crowd of Christians appeared, demanding martyrdom. Arrius Antoninus, the proconsul, obliged a few and told the rest to find somewhere else to commit suicide.¹¹³ Eusebius records with

¹⁰⁵ I am following Musurillo in a tentative acceptance of the *Acta* he has collected (Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. liv, lvii). For my purposes their historical accuracy is of less importance than the reaction of later Christians to these accounts.

¹⁰⁶ Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, p. xv.

¹⁰⁷ *Μαρτύριον τῶν Ἁγίων Κάρπου, Παπύλου, καὶ Ἀγαθονίκης* 44.

¹⁰⁸ *Idus Aprilis sanctorum martyrum Carpi episcopi et Pamfili diaconi et Agathonicae* 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Idus Aprilis sanctorum martyrum Carpi episcopi et Pamfili diaconi et Agathonicae* 6.

¹¹⁰ *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonicê* 42 (trans. Musurillo).

¹¹¹ Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. xv-xvi.

¹¹² Pliny, *Ep.* X. xcvi. 5.

¹¹³ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 5.

admiration “a most marvellous eagerness and a truly divine power and zeal” as Christian volunteers surrendered themselves to the authorities during the persecutions in the Thebais.¹¹⁴

An audience was required to witness the witnesses. At least one Roman official seems to have understood this. In A.D. 305 six young Christians demanded to be flung to the beasts at a public entertainment.¹¹⁵ The governor granted their wish to die, but not in the fashion they desired. He had them decapitated.¹¹⁶ Death by decapitation was considered a nobler and more humane form of execution. It is therefore possible that these young men belonged to the upper classes. The suspicion is, however, that the governor acted in such a way as to reduce the number of witnesses to their death and to frustrate the planned heroic demonstration of Christian faith in the arena.

A modern study that investigates fatal shootings by police officers is relevant here. The title of the article, ‘Suicide by Cop,’ anticipates the conclusion of the thesis.¹¹⁷ The author suggests that some people who are determined to die wish to do so with maximum publicity.¹¹⁸ Being shot by a police officer gratifies that desire. If the confrontation is fatal, then the “the blaze of glory”¹¹⁹ must of course be imagined, and enjoyed, in advance. Here the Christian martyr had the advantage. Those who died in the arena did so in full public view before a crowd often equal to any attending a major sporting event in the modern world.

De Ste. Croix suggests that the impetus for such desire on the part of some Christians to proclaim their faith by the sacrifice of their lives comes from Jewish martyr literature, especially *Maccabees* II and IV.¹²⁰ Bowersock challenges this theory in *Martyrdom and Rome*.¹²¹ He maintains that the model of death for a cause derives from those Stoics of the early empire who chose to die rather than live under tyranny. The Stoic ‘martyrs’ also needed witnesses to their

¹¹⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.* VIII. ix. 5.

¹¹⁵ Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* III. ii. 4.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Richard B. Parent, ‘Suicide by Cop’, *Australian Police Journal* 55. 3 (September 2001): 167-173.

¹¹⁸ Parent, ‘Suicide by Cop,’ p. 172.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ de Ste. Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’ p. 23.

¹²¹ See note 70 above.

deaths. They did not, of course, provide a vulgar spectacle in the arena. Their witnesses were their *familia* and their *familiares* and usually an imperial official whose role was to assure the emperor that the sentence had been carried out. Seneca's death, modelled on that of Socrates, is the paradigm of the philosophical resistance to tyranny. Seneca ensured that his dying was 'witnessed' by a wider audience than those physically present. While he was dying he dictated his last message to the world.¹²² This work was so well known to Tacitus' contemporaries that the historian felt no need to record it himself.¹²³

A. 6 St. Jerome and St. Ambrose

St. Jerome's attitude to suicide is ambivalent. Like Seneca, Jerome insisted that one should await the executioner rather than anticipate him, although his reasoning is different. According to Seneca, the good man under sentence of death will spend his last hours in useful activity, if at all possible, rather than commit suicide.¹²⁴ The bad man in similar circumstances might as well kill himself as there is no point in any longer continuing a useless life when there is insufficient time to reform.¹²⁵ Jerome believed that it is preferable to die at another's hands rather to use violence against oneself. He disapproved of suicide except under one specific circumstance, rape or the threat of rape. He writes that Christians are not permitted to commit suicide during persecution, unless their chastity is threatened:

*et in persecutionibus non licet propria perire manu absque eo ubi castitas periclitatur, sed percutienti colla submittere.*¹²⁶

Heterosexual rape is implied, if not explicit. St. Jerome believed that chastity and virginity, especially the latter, were more important than life itself. He was convinced that rape destroyed the victim's chastity. In *Aduersus Iouinianum* he heaps praise on women who killed themselves, and sometimes their children as well,¹²⁷ to escape *quid indecens* at the hands of an enemy.¹²⁸ He

¹²² Tacitus, *Annals* XV. 63.

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* LXX; Chapter 3. 3 above.

¹²⁵ *ibid.* Seneca followed his own advice only in part: he did spend his last hours in constructive work, but he did not await the executioner.

¹²⁶ St. Jerome, *In Ionam* I. 12.

¹²⁷ Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 43. The woman who is held up as an example was neither Roman nor Christian. She was the wife of Hasdrubal. See also Jerome, *Ep.* CXXIII. 7: *Ad Geruchiam*.

¹²⁸ *...ne quid indecens ab hostibus sustinerent, turpitudinem, morte fugerunt..*(St. Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 41).

expresses particular admiration for one woman because she committed suicide only after killing her attacker with his own sword.¹²⁹ The use of a weapon was, in Roman eyes, a ‘virtuous,’ even heroic, method of dying.¹³⁰ That she used the same weapon for both deaths is also worthy of mention.¹³¹ The use of the same weapon is of symbolic importance and recurs on many occasions.¹³²

It is significant that in both *Aduersus Iouinianum* and *Ad Geruchiam* the only Roman example of suicide following rape is the famous one of Lucretia. Jerome cites no other instances of Roman women killing themselves after having been raped nor to avoid rape, despite his claim at *Aduersus Iouinianum* 46 that *ad Romanas feminas transeam*, after spending chapters 41 and 43 to 45 providing examples of both Greek and barbarian women who died in defence of their chastity. He does cite famous instances of chaste Roman women but none except Lucretia committed suicide.¹³³ It is difficult to believe that if Jerome knew of Roman examples equal to the dramatic tales of Phidon’s virgin daughters or the seven virgins of Miletus¹³⁴ or the wife of Niceratus,¹³⁵ all of whom committed suicide rather than suffer rape, he would not have used them. The examples provided, of Roman women who declined to remarry after the death of a husband, pale in comparison.

St. Jerome was not the only Christian leader who approved of suicide when committed by a woman to preserve her chastity. Both Ambrose and Eusebius believed that suicide was laudable under such circumstances.¹³⁶ They were not, perhaps, as enthusiastic as St. Jerome who appears to have felt that death rather than rape was not so much excusable as obligatory.

¹²⁹ St. Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 41.

¹³⁰ *ferro sub papillam dexteram transadacto corruit ...* ‘(scilicet Charite) proflauit animam uirilem’ (Apuleius, *Golden Ass* VIII. 14); van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide*, pp. 47-54.

¹³¹ St. Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 42, 43.

¹³² See, for example, the description of the suicide of Lucius Antistius Vetus and his family in Tacitus, *Annals* XVI. 11 and the story of Arria and her husband related by the younger Pliny (Pliny, *Ep.* III. xvi).

¹³³ St. Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 46: Bilia, wife of Duilius; Marcia, the younger daughter of Cato; Porcia, the wife of Brutus; Annai; Marcella; Valeria, wife of Seruius.

¹³⁴ St. Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 41.

¹³⁵ St. Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum* I. 44.

¹³⁶ St. Ambrose, *Ep.* 37; *De uirginibus* III. vii. 32-39; Eusebius, *H. E.* VIII. xiv. 14, 17.

St. Ambrose, like Jerome, encapsulates some of the early Christian ambivalence towards suicide. In *De uirginibus* III he asserts that Scripture forbids a Christian woman inflicting violence on herself ... *Scriptura diuina uim sibi Christianam prohibeat inferre*. The clause is presented as part of a question from his sister on how those women are to be regarded who killed themselves to escape their persecutors by jumping to their deaths or by drowning, since scripture forbids a Christian using violence against herself.¹³⁷ Scripture in fact does nothing of the sort. This point will be discussed more fully in the next section. Unlike St. Augustine, St Ambrose does not digress from his theme to present evidence for this statement.

It is *Christianae* who are the subject of the enquiry rather than Christians in general. The threat of rape is clearly implied. Another point is that two methods of suicide are specified: *quae se praecipitauerunt ex alto, uel in fluuium demerserunt*. This could be no more than a literary device to lead Ambrose into the story of St. Pelagia's mother and sisters who drowned themselves in a river rather than allow themselves to be captured.¹³⁸ It is possible however that Ambrose is making a case to demonstrate that to die by drowning is not the same as the use of violence to kill oneself. It is similar to believing that to cause another to starve to death means that there is, metaphorically as well as literally, no blood on the killer's hands. The words placed in Pelagia's mouth appear to contradict the interpretation of *Scriptura diuina uim sibi Christianam prohibeat inferre* as a prohibition against suicide. "God is not offended by a remedy against evil," muses St. Pelagia, "and faith permits the deed."¹³⁹ She claims that if the act is voluntary then it cannot be termed violence; violence is to want to die and to be unable to do so.¹⁴⁰ She considers the methods available to her: "... there are so many easy ways to death... I am not afraid that my right hand may fail to deliver the blow, or that my breast may shrink from the pain... I shall not be afraid if there is no sword. I can die by my own weapons..."¹⁴¹ We are not told how Pelagia

¹³⁷ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 32.

¹³⁸ The fate of Pelagia herself is not clear in Ambrose's version of the story. She was alone in the house that was surrounded by a mob and contemplating suicide rather than be shamed (St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 33). She dressed herself as a bride, then *ast ubi detestandi persecutores ereptam sibi uiderunt praedam pudoris* (St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 34), implying that her enemies found her corpse. The account then concentrates on St. Pelagia's mother and sisters who were trapped between the mob and a fast-flowing river.

¹³⁹ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 33.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 33. The words are more likely to be Ambrose's rather than Pelagia's but the sentiments could well be hers.

died. The inference is clear: *Ast ubi detestandi persecutores ereptam sibi uiderunt praedam pudoris, matrem et sorores coeperunt quaerere.*¹⁴² Plainly she was dead when her persecutors found her but how she died remains obscure.

St. Pelagia's mother and sisters regarded the river that cut off their escape as baptismal water that would protect them as well as opening the route to heaven.¹⁴³ Whether these are Ambrose's own sentiments ascribed to the women, or whether he is recording a tradition of the martyrs' last words, there can be little doubt that he agreed with them. The river did not separate mother and daughters, nor did it expose their bodies, thus seeming to indicate divine approval of their actions.¹⁴⁴

This story demonstrates two methods of suicide and a remarkable difference in sentiment. Pelagia contemplated a violent death that involved a weapon although she was not concerned if none was available. She was confident that she would find a way to die. Her words are reminiscent of Senecan thought. In *De ira* III. xv. 4, for example, Seneca writes, "Wherever you look there is the end of your troubles... Do you see your throat, your gullet, your heart?"

Except for a reference to *sacrilegae arae* there are no overtly Christian aspects to Pelagia's reflections.¹⁴⁵ There is no reference to being with Christ. She wanted only to die in her mother's arms.¹⁴⁶ Her mother and sisters, on the other hand, are provided with a speech that is Christian in tone. They speak of the river as baptismal water, washing away sin and creating martyrs.¹⁴⁷ They sought a passive rather than an active death by allowing themselves to drown. Although the cause of Pelagia's death is left a mystery, a violent and self-inflicted end is possible and even likely. There can be no doubt that her mother and sisters committed suicide. Ambrose does not differentiate between the women's methods of dying. He does not criticise St. Pelagia's speech

¹⁴² St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 34.

¹⁴³ *Ecce aqua, quis nos baptizari prohibet? Et hoc baptismum est, quo peccata donantur, regna quaeruntur... Excipiat nos aqua, quae coelum aperit, infirmos tegit, mortem abscondit, martyres reddit* (St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 34).

¹⁴⁴ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 34-36.

¹⁴⁵ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 33.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* III. vii. 34.

nor express greater admiration for the manner of death of her mother and sisters. The fact that Pelagia is ‘Saint Pelagia’ and her mother and sisters are not even named, let alone beatified, indicates that the early church regarded her with greater reverence despite, or perhaps because of, her mode of death.

Dudden maintains that Ambrose did not state a clear position on women who kill themselves to avoid rape,¹⁴⁸ despite Ambrose’s clear approval of the women’s choice. He suggests that the Pelagia story expresses neither commendation nor condemnation. He then contrasts these examples with that of another (unnamed) virgin, also from Antioch. She was condemned to a brothel. Dudden (followed by Amundsen¹⁴⁹) claims that Ambrose’s admiration for this woman is “unqualified” because she did not commit suicide to avoid the penalty imposed. St. Ambrose describes how the woman was rescued by a Christian soldier posing as a client.¹⁵⁰ The man exchanged clothes with her, and, muffled in his cloak, she escaped unchallenged and unmolested. The soldier was condemned to death.¹⁵¹ Now the story becomes interesting for the purposes of this study. The woman who had been saved appeared at the place of execution, demanding that she die with her rescuer. Moreover she asked to be executed first.

*Est in uirgine uulneri locus, qui non erat contumeliae. Ego opprobrium declinaui, non martyrimum... In te non habent aliam quam exerceant, poenam: in uirgine obnoxius pudor est.*¹⁵²

This woman, too, preferred death to rape. She gave herself up because she feared that if she did not die with her rescuer she would be recaptured and the original sentence would be carried out.¹⁵³ She could, plausibly, have committed suicide during her period of freedom. She resembles the case studies described by Parent in that she preferred that someone else kill her. The story is not entirely logical. How could the heroine be confident of execution when she surrendered herself? It seems just as likely that the original sentence would be insisted on. The

¹⁴⁸ F. Homes Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, vol. I, Oxford, 1935, p. 157.

¹⁴⁹ Darrel W. Amundsen, ‘Suicide and Early Christian Values,’ in Baruch A. Brody (ed), *Suicide and Euthanasia. Historical and Contemporary Themes*, Philosophy and Medicine, vol. 35, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 1989, p. 122.

¹⁵⁰ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* II. iv. 29-30.

¹⁵¹ St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* II. iv. 32.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Dum mihi hanc sententiam negas, illam restituis superiorem* (St. Ambrose, *De uirginibus* II. iv. 32).

message, however, is clear and unambiguous. It is better that a woman die than submit to rape and it is preferable to be executed by the authorities rather than to kill oneself. Ambrose's audience is expected to revere this anonymous woman as a virtuous martyr. Although the beginning of this incident supports Dudden's contention that Ambrose praised the woman for accepting the sentence rather than committing suicide to avoid it, the ending does not.

The historical accuracy, or otherwise, of these accounts is of little moment for the purposes of this discussion. As with the various *Acta Martyrum* the important factor is the attitude of the writer and the assumed attitude of the audience for whom he wrote. St. Augustine was sufficiently troubled by the expectation that a raped woman should commit suicide that he begins his argument against suicide with an admonition that rape victims who did not kill themselves should not be censured.

The preoccupation with the preservation at all costs of a woman's chastity, and especially of an unmarried woman's virginity, was not confined to Christian leaders, but it does appear to have acquired a greater emphasis than previously in Latin literature. Despite the Lucretia story there is little evidence of non-Christian Roman women committing suicide after rape. Evidence for women preferring to kill themselves rather than submit to rape is also lacking.

A survey of the cases of rape debated in declamation and *controuersiae* turned up only three cases where the victim killed herself, or threatened to do so.¹⁵⁴ In the minor declamations ascribed to Quintilian, *Declamatio 270* states that a rape victim hanged herself.¹⁵⁵ Her father, determined to exact revenge, substituted the girl's twin sister for the victim. Exercising the victim's *optio* of the death penalty for the rapist, or his marriage to her, but without a dowry, she chose his death and the offender was duly executed.¹⁵⁶ Seneca the Elder recorded a *controuersia* in which the father of a rape victim is accused of unnecessary delay in bringing his daughter to

¹⁵⁴ It is not clear whether these works reflect the values of the society in which they were composed, or whether they are intellectual exercises with no grounding in reality. S. F. Bonner (*Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire*, Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1959, pp. 36-37, 89-91, 107) believes that they do reflect a basic reality.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Winterbottom (ed.), *The Minor Declamations Ascribed to Quintilian*, *Texte und Kommentare*, vol. 13, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984, p. 65f.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

court so that she might exercise her *optio*.¹⁵⁷ The father, in righteous indignation, protests that he has been preoccupied since the assault on his daughter. Not only has he had to comfort her he has also been forced to guard her to prevent her from killing herself. In the third instance the victim wept in court, apparently unable to speak.¹⁵⁸ A sympathetic magistrate condemned her supposed attacker to death. The young woman subsequently hanged herself. The clear implication is that despite the accusation of rape, probably brought by her father, sex was consensual and the young woman did not want to continue living after her lover's death.

These case studies demonstrate that in the world of the declamation there was no expectation that a raped woman should kill herself. In fact the contrary is the case. The victim's presence in court is essential for the sentencing of the offender; hence the case of the father's substitution of the victim's twin sister. Of the two women who committed suicide after having been raped, one did so because her alleged attacker was executed.

Valerius Maximus preserves examples of young women who were killed to preserve their honour or to punish them for its loss.¹⁵⁹ It is significant, however, that, except for Lucretia, Valerius does not in fact record any tales of Roman women committing suicide in defence of their chastity or after having been raped. The other women whose stories he tells were killed by their own fathers.¹⁶⁰ One, that of Virginia, seems to be no more than "a reworking of the story of Lucretia."¹⁶¹ Another, that of Pontius Aufidianus and his daughter, is unknown from any other source.¹⁶² In the story of Lucretia, Valerius' concentration is more on the effects of her death rather than the reason for it.

... se... interemit, causamque tam animoso interitu imperium consulare pro regio
permutandi populo Romano praebuit.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* III. 5. This appears to be a longer version of Calpurnius Flaccus, *Declamation* 34 (Lewis A. Sussman [ed.], *The Declamations of Calpurnius Flaccus* 34, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava, supplement 133, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, pp. 73-74).

¹⁵⁸ *The Declamations of Calpurnius Flaccus* 16 (Sussman [ed.], p. 50).

¹⁵⁹ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* VI. 1. 1-4, 6, ext.1.

¹⁶⁰ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* VI. 1. 2, 3.

¹⁶¹ Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia. A Myth and its Transformations*, Oxford, 1982, p. 7 with note 16.

¹⁶² Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed. and trans.), Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2000, editor's note 3, p. 4.

¹⁶³ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, VI. 1. 1.

The only woman in this section of Valerius' work who did commit suicide to protect her chastity is a Greek named Hippo.¹⁶⁴ This story, too, is confined to Valerius.¹⁶⁵

Such stories of death before dishonour could be considered a topos of the literary elite if it were not for an inscription honouring the memory of a young woman named Domitilla.¹⁶⁶ The epitaph records with pride the motivation for her death. She preferred to die rather than submit to rape by barbarian invaders.¹⁶⁷ The fact that she was the only young woman so threatened who chose death is a further source of mournful pride to her commemorator.¹⁶⁸ It also demonstrates that none of the other women in her community felt the necessity to kill themselves. Implicit also is the criticism of the women who submitted to the crime instead of dying to avoid it. It should be noted that, despite the heroine's Roman name, the inscription is in Greek and has an Eastern provenance.¹⁶⁹ It dates from the Christian period, the third century, although it is unclear whether the dead girl herself, or her husband, was Christian.

I can find no evidence for a Roman tradition of suicide to avoid rape, or, in spite of Lucretia, from shame after rape. An examination of the 960 cases of self killing collected by van Hooff¹⁷⁰ revealed only one certainly pagan Roman woman who committed suicide after having been raped – Lucretia.¹⁷¹ There are none recorded in the collection who killed themselves to avoid being raped.¹⁷² There appears to have been no expectation amongst Roman pagans that a woman

¹⁶⁴ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, VI. 1. ext. 1

¹⁶⁵ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed. and trans), p. 12, note 16.

¹⁶⁶ Ismail Kaygusuz, 'Funerary Epigram of Karzene (Paphlagonia): A Girl Raped by the Goths?' *Epigraphica Anatolica* 4 (1984), p. 61; W. D. Lebek, 'Das Grabepigramm auf Domitilla,' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 59 (1985), p. 7. I have accepted Lebek's restorations of the text. Kaygusuz's conclusion that "... she was still a child, so that the barbarians did not abuse her" seems unlikely.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ van Hooff (*From Autothanasia to Suicide*, p. 24) writes that she was commemorated by her parents. There is nothing in the inscription to indicate who commemorated her. It seems just as likely, if not more so, that her husband (she had been married for seven months according to the inscription) erected her epitaph.

¹⁶⁹ Kaygusuz, 'Funerary Epigram of Karzene (Paphlagonia),' p. 61.

¹⁷⁰ van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide*, p. 198f.

¹⁷¹ The truth, or otherwise, of these stories is not important to the argument. The interest lies in the attitude expressed by the authors who discuss them and also in the attitude these authors ascribe to others. These opinions sometimes continued to be influential long after the authors' lifetime, St. Augustine's proscription on suicide discussed below, for example. The opinion that a woman should choose suicide before rape was also destined for a long history in Christian centuries, despite the conflict with the prohibition on suicide.

¹⁷² I used two modern collections of ancient suicides in this investigation. One was compiled by van Hooff and consists of a collection of 960 cases of self-killing, both Greek and Roman, historical and fictional, and ranges in

should kill herself to avoid rape, nor that the suicide of the victim was an appropriate response to the crime.¹⁷³ Rome placed a high value on a woman's chastity (and on that of a young man as well), but death rather than rape seems to have been a Christian innovation. It was, perhaps, a notion that developed in conjunction with the idea of perpetual virginity for many women. Roman women traditionally were expected to marry. Augustan legislation encouraged widows to remarry, despite the contradiction remarriage posed to another ideal, that of the *uniuir*. Even Vestal Virgins were permitted to marry at the completion of their thirty years of service,¹⁷⁴ although it appears that few did so.

It could perhaps be due to the strand of misogyny in Christianity that is evident from its earliest writings. It appears in St. Paul's advice to women that they must dress and behave modestly, not speak in Christian meetings, and defer to their husbands.¹⁷⁵ Tertullian is even more repressive.¹⁷⁶ Cyprian, too, condemns women who adorn themselves, although his criticism is aimed more narrowly at those who had chosen the life of consecrated virgins, rather than women in general.¹⁷⁷ All appear to be following Jewish tradition. Paul and Tertullian base their argument on the story of the criminal behaviour of Eve in breaking God's law, and persuading Adam to be her accomplice. Tertullian also blames women for attracting fallen angels who passed on to them secrets best left hidden.¹⁷⁸ According to this view all women have inherited the guilt consequent on Eve's wrongdoing.¹⁷⁹ Cyprian's appeal to Scripture is more general and less damning. It includes an exhortation to continence aimed at men.¹⁸⁰ The attitude expressed by both Paul and Tertullian leads easily to a belief that the victim is to blame for the rapist's crime and must

time from Homer to the fifth century A.D. (*From Autothanasia to Suicide*, Appendix A). The other was compiled by Gris  (Yolande Gris , 'De la fr quence du suicide chez les Romains,' *Latomus* 39 (1980), p. 21f.). The collection by Gris  is more restricted than van Hooff's, being confined to Roman cases, beginning about 753 B.C. and ending about A.D. 192. There are no overtly fictional examples.

¹⁷³ 141 Greek women are included in both compilations; 42, or 30%, of these women committed suicide for the motive of *pudor* (van Hooff's usual, but not invariable term denoting rape). van Hooff's list contains fictional stories from legend, plays, etc.

¹⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Numa* 10.

¹⁷⁵ Ephesians 5. 22; 1 Timothy 2. 9-14.

¹⁷⁶ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*; see also Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 27f.

¹⁷⁷ St. Cyprian, *De habitu uirginum*; see also Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* II, p. 34.

¹⁷⁸ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* II. 1.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ St. Cyprian, *De habitu uirginum* 4.

therefore expiate her supposed guilt. St. Augustine's clear prohibition was designed to end any confusion about Christian attitudes on the question of taking one's own life.

A. 7 St. Augustine

With important qualifications, before the time of St. Augustine, Christians regarded suicide in a similar light as other members of their society. It was only with Augustine that the full implication of Christian morality on the topic became clear.

All the philosophical schools of Greek and Roman antiquity, except that of Pythagoras,¹⁸¹ tolerated, and sometimes approved of, suicide under certain circumstances. These circumstances varied with the philosophy and the individual concerned. Roman law, as we have seen, did not recognise suicide as a crime. General pagan opinion, as far as that can be established, did not condemn suicide. As a young man Augustine had contemplated killing himself after the death of *dimidius animae suae*.¹⁸² But the prospect of death offered him no refuge from the pain of life as it had for Pliny.¹⁸³

Jewish tradition expresses no view. The Old Testament contains examples of suicide without adverse comment. The defenders of Masada killed themselves rather than suffer capture by their Roman conquerors and were admired by Josephus for doing so,¹⁸⁴ and also by modern Israel. Christian opinion also condoned self-killing, again under certain conditions. With such a background of tolerance at least and applause at best, Augustine faced a daunting prospect in changing attitudes. The fact that he was successful, and in a surprisingly short time,¹⁸⁵ is testament to his authority and to his powers of persuasion. The climate of opinion was changing, as is demonstrated by the decrease in admiration for voluntary martyrdom. It is difficult to decide how much Augustine himself influenced this change. At the very least his contribution was significant.

¹⁸¹ Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death. Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*, San Francisco: Harper, 1992, p. 20.

¹⁸² St. Augustine, *Confessions* IV. 6.

¹⁸³ *...quoniam ea conditio uitae est ut mori plerumque etiam optimis portus sit* (Pliny the Elder, *N. H.* XXV. xxiv).

¹⁸⁴ L. D. Hankoff, 'The Theme of Suicide in the Works of Flavius Josephus,' *Clio Medica* II. 1 (1976): 15-24.

¹⁸⁵ About forty years. See note 240 below.

Augustine was not the first Christian thinker to condemn suicide. We have seen that both Ambrose and Jerome disapproved, with certain exceptions. Lactantius held that death ought to be despised, but not deliberately sought:¹⁸⁶ to kill oneself is an act that is *sceleratum ac nefarium*.¹⁸⁷ Augustine was, however, the first to provide evidence and a compelling argument for his position. Lactantius, Ambrose and Jerome merely stated the prohibition as if it were self-evident. Ambrose and Jerome then undermined their stance by positively advocating suicide under certain circumstances.

About A.D. 413 Augustine formulated what would become the law of the Christian church on suicide.¹⁸⁸ The fact that he devotes twelve, admittedly brief, chapters of *De ciuitate Dei* to supporting his view on the immorality of suicide, is an indication of the difficulty he faced in his effort to have self-killing declared a sin. He begins with the Christian women raped during the contemporary sack of Rome.¹⁸⁹ He maintains that those who committed suicide in order to escape such a fate were deserving of pardon.¹⁹⁰ But note that it is pardon rather than applause. Those who refused to kill themselves must not be censured.¹⁹¹ There is, then, the implication that some, perhaps many, Christians shared the view of Ambrose and Jerome that a woman should commit suicide rather than submit to rape. St. Augustine has a different opinion. Virtue is in the mind and rape cannot destroy the victim's chastity, unless she enjoyed the act.¹⁹² The body of a rape victim can be violated but her mind can remain chaste.¹⁹³ This is similar to Seneca's contention that the soul remains untouched even though the body might be wounded.¹⁹⁴ To kill oneself was, in Augustine's opinion, a sin that imperilled the immortal soul.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁶ *Item uirtus est, mortem contemnere: non ut appetamus, eamque ultro nobis inferamus*, (Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* VI. xvii. 25).

¹⁸⁷ Lactantius, *Diu. Inst.* VI. xvii. 25.

¹⁸⁸ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xvii. 20; van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide*, pp. 195-197.

¹⁸⁹ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xvi.

¹⁹⁰ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xvii.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xvi.

¹⁹³ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xviii.

¹⁹⁴ ... *nec per illud ad me ullum transire uulnus sino. Quicquid in me potest iniuriam pati, hoc est* (Seneca, *Ep.* LXV. 21).

¹⁹⁵ van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide*, p. 196.

In order to make his point, Augustine reviewed and re-interpreted famous suicides from Rome's long history.¹⁹⁶ He begins with the tale of Lucretia, who killed herself from shame after having been raped.¹⁹⁷ All the shame, claims Augustine, belonged to her attacker. She had done nothing shameful, or had she? What if she had secretly enjoyed the violence done to her?¹⁹⁸ If that were the case, she had added murder to adultery.¹⁹⁹ If she had been an innocent victim, then she had no reason to feel shame and no need to kill herself.²⁰⁰ By doing so she had made herself an even worse criminal than the rapist. He was guilty of rape, but she was guilty of murder.²⁰¹

There is no hint in Livy's version of the story of any doubt of Lucretia's innocence. Both her husband and her father assured her that no blame could attach to her.²⁰² But when she killed herself despite all their efforts to dissuade her, she became an example to be admired for almost a millennium.²⁰³ Even a Christian writer like Tertullian could hold her up as an admirable example of monogamy.²⁰⁴ No one, it seems, until St. Augustine, had the slightest reservation on either her chastity or her right to end her own life if she believed that its continuation would be unbearable.²⁰⁵ There was more to Lucretia's death than Augustine acknowledges. Her self-sacrifice was the immediate cause of one of the defining events of Roman history, the expulsion of the kings.²⁰⁶ It is doubtful whether rape was a crime that would have been sufficient to incite

¹⁹⁶ Whether these examples are historical or mythical is immaterial. It matters that they were thought to be historical.

¹⁹⁷ St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* I. xix.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *ibid.* Despite Augustine's opinion that an innocent Lucretia should not have felt shamed, Le Saint, writing in 1951, could note that Lucretia was "dishonoured by Sextus Tarquinius" (Tertullian, *An Exhortation to Chastity*, William P. Le Saint (trans), Ancient Christian Writers, The Lives of the Fathers in Translation, Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1951, p. 149, note 114).

²⁰¹ Some three centuries before St. Augustine's time, Quintilian had pondered the question of whether suicide is a form of murder. His conclusion was the reverse of Augustine's. In his opinion the killing of self is in no way equivalent to the killing of another. *Res enim manifesta est, sciturque non idem est occidere se quod alium...* (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* VII. iii. 7).

²⁰² Livy I. lviii. 9-10.

²⁰³ Lucretia's suicide might have been admired, but it was not necessarily emulated. Neither Suetonius nor Tacitus reports the suicide of any aristocratic woman who was the sexual prey of one of the 'wicked' emperors.

²⁰⁴ Tertullian, *An Exhortation to Chastity* 13, *Monogamy* 17.

²⁰⁵ Livy, I. lviii. 10.

²⁰⁶ Livy, I. lix. 9-60.

her menfolk to rebellion, but a dead wife and daughter, whose death could be blamed on the king's son, provided a more powerful motive.²⁰⁷

The other Roman examples used by St. Augustine are those of Regulus and Cato. He maintains that Regulus was a better man than the Stoic hero. The latter used violence against himself, Regulus died because he kept his word and returned to captivity, although he knew it meant certain death.²⁰⁸ It seems then that the interdict on suicide was not absolute. It was more important, in Augustine's opinion, that Regulus be true to his oath (although sworn by false gods²⁰⁹) than it was to preserve his life.

In the eyes of Cato's admirers Caesar's victory was the sign for Cato that his life had run its full course: *cum uero causam iustam deus ipse dederit, ut tunc Socrati, nunc Catoni*.²¹⁰ This idea would seem to answer St. Augustine's objection that if death were the preferred option for the good man under these circumstances, why did Cato urge his son to flee and save himself rather than join him in death?²¹¹ The Stoic response would have been that the sign was for Cato alone; his son should await his own summons. This was the appropriate time for Cato to die. It was not that it was necessary for him as a Stoic to die because of the failure of his political cause. It was his time to die because he could not continue to live virtuously under the autocracy of Caesar.²¹² St. Augustine of course did not recognise the *deus* whose command Cato obeyed. Approval for killing on the command of god was extended only to those who followed Augustine's God. The examples provided by Cato and Regulus also furnish Augustine with a distinction between two different types of suicide. Cato turned his sword against himself, with the intention of killing himself. Regulus' motive was not to die, but to keep his word. Cato was fully responsible for his own death. The Carthaginians were responsible for killing Regulus.

²⁰⁷ Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*, pp. 23-24.

²⁰⁸ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxiv.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*

²¹⁰ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I. 74.

²¹¹ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxiii.

²¹² Seneca, *De prouidentia* II. 10-11, *Ep.* LXX. 4-6. Seneca's note on Sextius (*Ep.* XCVIII. 13) is apposite. Sextius refused the office Caesar wished to bestow on him. Cato preferred not to be in a position to have any offer made, including that of political office, pardon or life itself. There can be little doubt that Caesar would have been delighted to extend his famous clemency to Cato. Cato felt that he could not live in a system where one man held the power to extend or withhold mercy.

This question of motive has a Stoic ring. The *sapiens* acts always from the correct motive, even if the result is fatal.²¹³ According to Seneca the wise man is responsible for the reasons for his actions, but not always for their results.²¹⁴ The decision for any action is within our power but its outcome may not be.²¹⁵

The distinction between the deliberate killing of oneself and placing oneself in such a position that death is inevitable also avoids the thorny problem posed by those Christian martyrs who endangered their own lives (and sometimes those of others) by deliberately provoking the authorities. By St. Augustine's time pagan persecution of Christians had ceased. Christian leaders who had the ear of secular authority were now in a position to persecute other Christians whose beliefs they regarded as unorthodox. The issue of how to behave during sporadic pagan persecutions no longer exercised the minds of Christian thinkers as it had done a century earlier. Differing, and changing, attitudes towards voluntary martyrdom have already been discussed.

After dealing with pagan examples St. Augustine appeals to Biblical authority. Here he was presented with a problem. The Bible does not condemn suicide.²¹⁶ There are at least seven individuals in the Old Testament who are noted as having killed themselves, with no hint of editorial disapproval.²¹⁷ Augustine ignores this inconvenient omission but points out that nowhere in *sanctis canonicis libris* is express permission given to kill oneself.²¹⁸ He then reinterprets the commandment that proscribes killing.²¹⁹ He notes that the prohibition against killing is not qualified.²²⁰ He himself, however, proposes a limitation. To the bare pronouncement: *non occides*,²²¹ Augustine would add *hominem*.²²² Without that all-important word, Augustine could have seemed to be aiding and abetting those who held beliefs that he

²¹³ Arius Didymus, *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* (Arthur J. Pomeroy [ed]) 5b8. 10-15; 11s. 35.

²¹⁴ *Denique consilium rerum omnium sapiens, non exitum spectat* (Seneca, *Ep.* XIV. 16).

²¹⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* XIV. 16.

²¹⁶ Robert Barnes, 'A Noble Death,' *Australian National Review*, 1: 9 (February, 1997), p. 40; Durkheim, *Suicide*, p. 170 with note 25.

²¹⁷ Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, p. xi.

²¹⁸ St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* I. xx.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ *ibid.*

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² *ibid.*

regarded as heretical, as he was well aware.²²³ Another problem with such a broad prohibition was that of judicial execution and warfare. St. Augustine had no intention of outlawing either.²²⁴ Therefore the simple command *non occides* had to be modified even further.²²⁵

There was yet another class of people to whom the commandment did not apply. They were those who acted on God's direct order.²²⁶ St. Augustine's approval of a command from God as an acceptable reason to commit suicide is all-important. By this means he could accept as martyrs those he, and his community, admired while labelling as self-murderers pagans like Cato. He could also deny the status of martyr to those Christians, whose beliefs he rejected, like the Donatists of his own time.²²⁷

The examples Augustine uses are Abraham, who was prepared to sacrifice his son, Jephthah, who did kill his daughter and, more interesting for the purposes of this study, Samson who killed himself in the process of killing many of his enemies.²²⁸ Samson is the only one of these examples who killed himself. He is comparable to Regulus in that his death was an unintended consequence of an admirable action. Regulus died because he kept his word; Samson died while killing the enemies of his people.

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ Augustine might have been the first Christian to desire an alteration to the wording of the sixth commandment; he has not been the last. On the west wall of the Anglican chapel in Fremantle Prison, Western Australia, there is a mural of the Ten Commandments painted by prisoners in about 1875. Since executions were carried out in the prison the authorities, like St. Augustine, required a change in the wording of the sixth commandment. It reads, "Thou shalt do no murder." In the United States of America in the late twentieth century, a police officer worried that he was guilty of breaking the commandment after having killed a man in the line of duty. He was counselled by the chaplain of his Police Department, who assured him that "... a lot of people think the Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but it doesn't say that. It says, 'Thou shalt not commit murder'" (David Klinger, *Into the Kill Zone. A Cop's Eye View of Deadly Force*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, p. 262).

²²⁵ *et ideo nequaquam contra hoc praeceptum fecerunt, quo dictum est: "Non occides", qui Deo auctore bella gesserunt aut personam gerentes publicae potestatis secundum eius leges, hoc est, iustissimae rationis imperium, sceleratos morte punierunt* (St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxi).

²²⁶ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxvi, where he refers to what could be the story of St. Pelagia's mother and sisters.

²²⁷ "Augustine is heir to the Cyprianic tradition" (Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian*, vol. III, p. 191): *extra ecclesiam constitutus et ab unitate atque a caritate diuisus coronari in morte non poterit* (St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 55. xvii. 2) For a discussion of Augustine's reaction to the Donatists see Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, pp. 169-173.

²²⁸ *nisi quia Spiritus latenter hoc iusserat, qui per illum miracula faciebat...* (St Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxi).

St. Augustine's conclusion is that it is lawful, even admirable, to kill others or oneself on the direct command of God.²²⁹ The difficulty here, of course, is how an individual can be confident of recognising an instruction from God. The insurmountable obstacle is convincing others, especially a professional priesthood with its claim of being mediator between God and humanity. Here the Stoic has an advantage. According to Seneca no Stoic is under an obligation to follow the precepts of a master.²³⁰ Quite the reverse, in fact; mature adults must be capable of more than dependence on another's teaching, they must be able to stand alone: *sibi iam innitatur*.²³¹

In addition to the examples used by St. Augustine there are Biblical suicides where the only motive is to bring about the death of the central character. King Saul killed himself after his sons fell in battle. His death is reported in a straightforward manner with no sign of editorial disapproval.²³² If anything, the king is presented as an heroic, if flawed, figure who had brought his fate upon himself by disobeying the commands of his God.²³³

St. Augustine also discusses the death of Judas Iscariot, in Christian eyes the most notorious suicide in the Bible. There are differences in the accounts of his death. Augustine refers to the tradition in which Judas is said to have hanged himself, as reported in the Gospel of Matthew. It is Augustine's view that Judas' suicide aggravated the crime of betrayal.²³⁴ He was in effect guilty of causing two deaths, his own as well as that of Jesus. There is no hint of this interpretation in the Gospel itself. The author reports that Judas hanged himself when he discovered that Jesus had been condemned.²³⁵ Whatever his motive had been when he identified Jesus to the authorities, it seems that, at least in the opinion of Matthew, Judas had not intended to cause his death. Overcome by remorse at the results of his actions, Judas returned the reward, then killed himself.²³⁶ The author's report of his suicide is neutral and matter-of-fact. No condemnation of his manner of death is implied, let alone stated. The author is more concerned

²²⁹ *uel ipse fons iustitiae Deus specialiter occidi iubet, quisquis hominem uel se ipsum uel quemlibet occiderit, homicidii crimine innectitur* (St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xxi).

²³⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 6-10.

²³¹ Seneca, *Ep.* XXXIII. 7-8.

²³² I Samuel 31.

²³³ I Samuel 28. 18.

²³⁴ St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xvii.

²³⁵ Matthew 27. 3-10.

²³⁶ *ibid.*

to record the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah in the use of the reward money to purchase the potter's field.²³⁷ This version of Judas' death contains similarities to the account of King Saul's death discussed above. Judas is not, of course, presented as a flawed hero, but there is something tragic about him. Confronted by the unforeseen consequences of his actions he felt he could not continue to live.

The canonical *Acts of the Apostles* preserves a different and more hostile account of Judas' end.²³⁸ Rather than spurning the reward Judas used the money to buy land. The author reports that Judas then fell and burst open, spilling all his entrails. It is for this reason, according to the author, that the field is known as the "Field of Blood."²³⁹ This tradition might seem to record a more appropriate penalty for the ultimate act of treachery than repentance followed by suicide. There is nothing tragic in *Acts*' portrayal of Judas' death. The reporting of the gruesome details suggests that the author felt a certain satisfaction that the traitor received his just deserts.

A. 8 Conclusion

Before St. Augustine's prohibition of suicide was adopted as the official position of the Christian church in 452,²⁴⁰ Christian, Jew and pagan shared a similar range of attitudes to self-killing. Suicide was tolerated and sometimes praised. Suicide for the 'right' motive could be admired, even venerated. Provoking another, especially a despised authority, into killing one could be regarded as especially commendable. Such action might be seen as martyrdom or *uirtus*, depending on the commentator's religious or philosophical position. A section of Christian opinion valued a woman's virginity so highly that its members expected her to kill herself rather than suffer rape and were willing to exhort women to do so. It is not by accident that St.

²³⁷ Matthew 27. 7-10.

²³⁸ Acts of the Apostles 1. 18-19.

²³⁹ Acts of the Apostles 2. 18-19.

²⁴⁰ In 452 the council of Arles declared suicide a crime (Durkheim, *Suicide*, p. 327). The Council of Orléans (Canon XV) in 533 ruled that funeral rites would be accorded those killed for a criminal offence, unless they had killed themselves. Canon XVI of the Council of Bracaraense in 563 forbade Christian burial for anyone who committed suicide.

Augustine begins his repudiation of suicide with a discussion of the Christian women who had been raped during the sack of Rome.²⁴¹

Whether consciously or not, Christian women who committed suicide after having been raped were following Senecan principles. For these women the humiliation and degradation they had suffered were more than they could bear. If any woman believed that rape compromised her opportunity to live in the way she desired, then she was entitled to take her own life. This was a decision that only she could make.²⁴² For over four hundred years there was no essential contradiction between Seneca's views and Christian opinion. Suicide could be, under certain circumstances, an acceptable option. Although pagans and Christians shared similar views on suicide there were striking differences also. Christians anticipated a blissful after-life in the presence of their Saviour. Pagans had no such expectation. They killed themselves in order to die.

The mixed attitudes of the first to fourth centuries demonstrate that Seneca's views on suicide can be accommodated within Christian attitudes. They were no barrier to accepting a 'Christianised' Seneca.

²⁴¹ *...stupra commissa, non solum in aliena matrimonia uirginesque nupturas, sed etiam in quasdam sanctimoniales* (St. Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* I. xvi).

²⁴² See Chapter 3. 3.

Appendix I

Key: Each *sententia* considered is ranked 1 to 5, depending on its perceived similarity to the Seneca citation suggested by Friedrich, where 5 is identical, except perhaps for a difference in word order, and 1 is no more than a similar thought expressed in different words.

The decisions on such ranking are necessarily subjective and empirical.

<i>De moribus sententiae</i>	Senecan parallel	similarity of Friedrich edition	similarity of Woelfflin edition
1	<i>Ep. LXVI.16</i>	1	1
10	<i>Ep. XII.8</i>	1	1
13	<i>Ep. XII.11</i>	1	1
19	<i>Ep. XX.13</i>	nil	nil
21	<i>De ira II.xxxiii.3</i>	1	1
39	<i>De remediis I.8</i>	1	1
40	<i>De remediis VII.1</i>	1	5
41	<i>De remediis VII.3</i>	1	5
42	<i>?de remediis</i>	1	?
43	<i>De remediis</i>	1	4
44	<i>Ep. VIII.5</i>	3	3
45	<i>Ep. XIV.17</i>	1	1
46	<i>Ep. CVIII.11</i>	3	3
47	<i>De ben. III.xv.4</i>	4	4
60	<i>De remediis X</i>	4	nil
61	<i>Ep. CV.4</i>	5	5
65	<i>Ep. XCVII.13</i>	4	?
65	<i>Ep. CV.8</i>	?	4
67	<i>De ben. II.xi</i>	3	3
67	<i>De ben. II.x.4</i>	4	4
72 & 73	<i>Ep. CXIV.2</i>	3	3
77	<i>Ep. II.4</i>	4	4

93	<i>Ad. Polyb. XVI.2</i>	1	1
98	<i>Ep. XC.4</i>	nil	nil
106	<i>De ira I.i.2</i>	2	2
119^a	<i>Ep. XI.9</i>	nil	nil
128	<i>De ben. I.i.8</i>	1	1

There are 155 *sententiae* listed in Pseudo-Seneca, *De moribus*, Friedrich (ed). Twenty-three of these (14.8%) are traceable to a possible Senecan original. Only ten, or 6.5%, are so close to the Seneca reference (score 3 or more) that a source from a Senecan work can be considered very likely.

The figures for (Pseudo-)Seneca, *Liber de moribus*, Woelfflin (ed) are essentially similar. Of the 149 *sententiae* listed, twenty-one, or 14.1%, scored 1 or more. Eleven (7.4%) are very close to the suggested Senecan original.

Appendix II The Chronologies of Paul's Death

Many attempts have been made to establish a chronology of Paul's life and death. It is Paul's death that is of greater interest to this study. The following offers no more than a brief overview.

Luedemann believes that there is no reliable information after Paul's last letter, which he dates to 52.¹ Roetzel agrees with this analysis, but dates Paul's last word to 57 when he left Jerusalem.²

Jewett follows a chronology suggested by the canonical Acts of the Apostles. Paul was imprisoned in Rome from 60 to 61 and was executed in 62.³ Acts suggests that Paul died between 62 and 64. As Roetzel notes it is only later tradition in the *Acts of Paul* that claims that Paul was executed in Rome.⁴

Tajra suggests the following chronology.⁵ Paul arrived in Rome in 60 as an appellant prisoner. He was released, without trial, in 62 because of the failure of his accusers to appear. Paul was at liberty for two years and possibly undertook a journey to Spain before returning to Rome. He was arrested again, tried, condemned and executed in late 63 or early 64, before the fire.

Bruce believes that Paul died in 65, after a trip to Spain.⁶ This chronology appears to be the best fit with the tradition apparently followed by the creator of the Senecan / Pauline correspondence. He has Paul alive and at some unspecified place outside Rome after the fire in 64. It is safe to assume that the author did not gain his knowledge of Paul's movements from the source where he found his information on the fire. Paul was too unimportant a person to figure in any official document, except perhaps the record of his trial, if he had one. Presumably the author used a tradition accepted by his group.

¹ See Roetzel, *Paul*, p. 181.

² Roetzel, *Paul*, p.183

³ Roetzel, *Paul*, p. 182.

⁴ Roetzel, *Paul*, p.183

⁵ Harry W. Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul*, p. 31.

⁶ Roetzel, *Paul*, p. 179.

Jerome dates Seneca's death to 66,⁷ noting that he was killed two years before St. Peter and St. Paul were martyred:

*Hic (sc. Seneca) ante biennium quam Paulus et Petrus martyrio coronarentur a Nerone interfectus est.*⁸

Paul's death, on this information, can be dated to 67 (provided Jerome was using inclusive counting), or to 68 if he was not. Trillitzsch accepts two years before the death of St. Peter and St. Paul, so 68 and later, therefore, than any date suggested by modern scholars. This date does fit in with the apocryphal letters that have both Seneca and St. Paul still alive during the persecution that followed the fires.

Jerome brackets Seneca's death with the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. This was probably intended to be no more than a convenient dating device. It would not be surprising, however, if a Christian audience thought of Seneca as a Christian martyr when he was linked in this fashion to Peter and Paul.

This information is summarised in the table on the following page.

⁷ Winfried Trillitzsch, *Seneca* I. p. 160, II, p. 370. Tacitus dates Seneca's death to 65.

⁸ Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* XII.

Reconstructed from or by:	Paul in Jerusalem	(First) sojourn in Rome	Spanish mission	(Second) sojourn in Rome	Death
Acts					*62-64
Apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul				Paul still not in Rome after the persecution	Not recorded
*Bruce	57	60-62	? 65	?	?65
Fox	? 59	? 60-62	-	-	61 or 62
Jerome					67 or 68
*Jewett	57	60-61	-	-	62
Tajra		60	62	63	late 63, early 64 (before the fire)
*Luedemann	52				
*Roetzel	57				
Kee ⁹ (after Jewett)	37 late 51 57	60 (stayed in Malta winter of 59-60)	-	-	62
Chilton ¹⁰	28 35 46 52 57	62-64	-	-	64

*Based on Calvin J. Roetzel, *Paul. The Man and the Myth*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, pp. 180-183.

⁹ Romans was written about 57.

¹⁰ Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul. An Intellectual Biography*, New York: Doubleday, 2004, p. 267ff.

Appendix III: Thomas Jefferson¹

Even a superficial study of the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and his slave, Sally Hemings, provides an example of the hazards involved in attempting to infer an individual's reactions to a given situation from previously expressed attitudes. During his own lifetime Jefferson was accused of keeping a slave mistress and fathering her children.² Miller energetically defends Jefferson against this charge.³ He denies the very existence of a son of Sally Hemings named Tom, who could have been the "Yellow Tom" alleged to have been fathered by Thomas Jefferson.⁴ This is the first plank of Miller's defence. Other elements rest on the contrast between Jefferson's attitude towards the children of his wife, his own acknowledged children, and those of Sally Hemings. He was overjoyed at the birth of his wife's children and mourned bitterly those who died.⁵ The birth of some of Hemings' children, on the other hand, was not even recorded.⁶ Nor were their deaths.⁷ Those whose births were noted received only cursory attention thereafter.⁸ This indifference was matched only by the indifference shown to those who survived childhood.⁹

The treatment of Sally Hemings herself betrays no sign that Jefferson regarded her with any special affection. She was not emancipated during his lifetime nor under the provisions of his will, although other Hemingses were given testamentary freedom.¹⁰ She herself was eventually freed by Martha Jefferson.¹¹

Jefferson's recognised descendants argue that the resemblance of some of Sally Hemings' children to Jefferson was not surprising. They were indeed closely related. Their father was one

¹ See p. 152-153 above.

² Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, pp. 154, 155

³ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, pp. 162-176.

⁴ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 156.

⁵ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 166.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 291.

⁸ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, pp. 165, 166.

⁹ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 165.

¹⁰ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 168.

¹¹ *ibid*

or other of Jefferson's nephews, Peter and Samuel Carr, the sons of his sister. These young men were frequent visitors to the plantation, including (perhaps especially) the slave quarters.¹² The work of Foster *et al.* shows that it is extremely unlikely that either of the nephews was the father of Eston Hemings.¹³ As sons of Jefferson's sister they did not share the unusual 'Jefferson' Y-chromosome.

Foster *et al.* have identified descendants of Thomas Woodson, the putative eldest son of Sally Hemings, supposedly born in 1790.¹⁴ They have concluded that Woodson was not the son of Thomas Jefferson.¹⁵ This Thomas Woodson is a shadowy figure. Miller denies his very existence.¹⁶ Brodie accepts both his existence and Jefferson's paternity.¹⁷ Yet there is so little trace of him that she is forced to conclude that "... Jefferson chose to consider him free from birth..." and/or ... "Tom Hemings... left Monticello at a relatively early age, probably shortly after the story of his mother's relationship with Jefferson broke into the press in 1802."¹⁸ Surely it is simpler to believe the evidence of Madison Hemings, Sally's fourth child, that the baby conceived in France died shortly after birth.¹⁹ It is possible that the descendants of Thomas Hemings are as mistaken in his maternity as in his paternity.²⁰

Foster *et al.* do not claim to have proven that Thomas Jefferson was the father of Sally Hemings' youngest son. Analysis of the Y- chromosomal DNA haplotypes of his male descendants can show only that he and Jefferson shared copies of the same unusual chromosome. It is possible that among Jefferson's slaves was one, or perhaps more, sons of his own father or of his grandfather. There is no mention of the existence of such a man, let alone his presence at Monticello, Jefferson's favourite property where Sally Hemings spent most of her life. The

¹² Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 296; Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, pp. 169-171.

¹³ Eugene A. Foster, M. A. Jobling, P. A. Taylor, P. Donnelly, P. de Knijff, Rene Mieremet, T. Zerjal, C. Tyler-Smith, 'Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child,' *Nature* 396 (1998): 27-28: p. 27.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 156, p. 169.

¹⁷ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 228, p.248.

¹⁸ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 292.

¹⁹ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, Appendix 1, Part 1: 'Reminiscences of Madison Hemings,' p. 473.

²⁰ Foster *et al.*, 'Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child', *Nature* 396 (1998): 27-28, p. 27.

balance of probability is, therefore, as Foster *et al.* conclude, that Thomas Jefferson was the father of Eston, the youngest child of his slave, Sally Hemings.

The scientific evidence can shed no light on whether the probable sexual relationship between Hemings and Jefferson extended over decades or whether Jefferson made casual use of this particular piece of his property. The weight of historical evidence seems to indicate the former. Jefferson was present at Monticello nine months before the birth of each of Sally Hemings' children.²¹ She conceived no children during his absences.²² Nor should the evidence of Madison Hemings²³ or of Israel Jefferson²⁴ be summarily dismissed.²⁵

The evidence of science and of history has combined to give strong support to contemporary reports that at least one of Jefferson's own children was a slave at Monticello. It would seem that Jefferson was indeed “prepared to make exceptions in his own case when it suited his purpose.”²⁶

²¹ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 296, p. 493; Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p. 170.

²² Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, p. 296.

²³ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, Appendix 1, p.473.

²⁴ Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, Appedix 1, Part 2, ‘Reminiscences of Israel Jefferson’, p. 481.

²⁵ As that of Madison Hemings, for example, is by Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, pp. 173-175.

²⁶ Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*, p.176.

Appendix IV Senecan Citations in Christian Authors¹

The following table summarises the information contained in Chapter Four.

Christian author and citation/reference	Approval (Y/N/?)	Senecan original
Tertullian		
<i>Apologeticum</i> 12. 6	?	n/a
50. 14	Y	<i>De remediis fortuitorum</i>
<i>De anima</i> 20.1	Y	<i>De ben.</i> IV. 6. 6
42. 2	N	<i>De remediis fortuitorum</i>
<i>De resurrectione carnis</i> I. 4	N	<i>De remediis fortuitorum</i>
III. 3	N	<i>De remediis fortuitorum</i>
Lactantius		
<i>Epitome diu. inst.</i> 4. 3 (<i>Diu. inst.</i> I. 5, 6).	Y	n/a
<i>Diu. inst.</i> I. 5. 26	Y	<i>De immatura morte</i> ; ² <i>Exhortationes</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> I. 7. 5	Y	<i>Exhortationes</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> I. 7. 13	Y	<i>Exhortationes</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> I. 16. 10f	Y	<i>Moralis philosophia</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> II. 2. 14	Y	<i>Moralis philosophia</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> II. 4. 14	Y	Sen. F95, 208 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> II. 8. 23	Y	Sen. F84, 198 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 12. 11	?	<i>De immatura morte</i> ³

¹This table is adapted from Trillitzsch, *Seneca* II, p. 362ff, with the aid of Bowen and Garnsey (trans), *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*.

² Lactantius is the only writer in antiquity to mention this work (Lausberg, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, p. 165). Both Lausberg (*ibid*) and Newman (Robert Joseph Newman, 'Senecae, *De remediis*, p. 231ff) argue that there was no such Senecan work. The quotes supposedly from *De immatura morte* are from Seneca, *De remediis fortuitorum*. See also Trillitzsch, *Seneca* p. 126 and Bowen and Garnsey, *Lactantius. Divine Institutes*, p. 9.

³ See note 1.

<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 15. 1	N	Sen. F82, 182 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 15. 11	Y	Sen. F77, 194 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 15. 13	N	Sen. F79, 196 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 15. 14	N	Sen. F79, 196 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 16. 15	Y	Sen. F83, 198 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 23. 14	?	Sen. F76, 194 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> III. 25.16f	N	Sen. F85, 200 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> V. 9. 19	Y	n/a
<i>Diu. inst.</i> V. 13. 20	Y	Sen. F78 194 (Vottero)
<i>Diu. inst.</i> V. 9. 18	Y	n/a
<i>Diu. inst.</i> V. 22. 11-12	Y	<i>De prouidentia</i> (lost portion) or paraphrase of <i>De prou.</i> ⁴
<i>Diu. inst.</i> VI. 17. 28	Y	<i>Moralis philosophia</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> VI. 24. 12-17	Y	
<i>Diu. inst.</i> VI 24.12-17		<i>Exhortationes</i>
<i>Diu. inst.</i> VI 25. 3	Y	<i>Exhortationes</i> (probably)
<i>De ira dei.</i> XVII.13f		<i>De ira</i> I. 2. 3, III. 3

St. Jerome

De uiris illustribus

Chronicon

(Trillitzsch II,p. 370)

Apologia aduersus libros Rufini

III. 39. 565 (Trillitzsch II,p. 370)

Aduersus Iouinianum I. 41. 5

Y

*De matrimonio?*⁵

Aduersus Iouinianum I. 44

Y

De matrimonio (Trillitzsch II, p. 369).

Aduersus Iouinianum I 44

Y

De matrimonio (Trillitzsch II, p. 369).

⁴ Bowen and Garnsey (trans.), *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, p. 327.

⁵ Trillitzsch believes these passages are from Seneca's *De matrimonia*. The evidence does not support this. In I. 49 he states that he has already quoted from treatises on matrimony by Aristotle, Plutarch and Seneca. It is not clear which quotes are from which authors.

<i>Aduersus Iouinianum</i> I. 46	Y	<i>De matrimonio</i> (Trillitzsch II, p. 369).
<i>Aduersus Iouinianum</i> I. 48	Y	<i>De matrimonio</i> (Trillitzsch II, p. 369)
<i>Aduersus Iouinianum</i> I. 49 (3 x citations in this one chapter)	Y	? <i>De matrimonia</i>
St. Augustine		
<i>Confessiones</i> V. 6. 11	?	Seneca just one author mentioned
<i>De ciuitate dei</i> V. 8	Y	<i>Ep.</i> CVII. 11
<i>De ciuitate dei</i> VI. 10	Y (while pointing to Seneca's hypocrisy in promoting, and even taking part in, the worship he criticised)	<i>De superstitione</i>
<i>De ciuitate dei</i> VI. 11	Y	Not cited

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