

I Clement, being a Roman citizen, even from my earliest youth was able to live chastely, my mind from my boyhood drawing away the lust that was in me to dejection and distress. For I had a habit of reasoning – how originating I know not – making frequent cogitations concerning death: When I die, shall I neither exist, nor shall any one ever have any remembrance of me, while boundless time bears all things of all men into forgetfulness? And shall I then be without being, or acquaintance with those who are; neither knowing nor being known, neither having been nor being? And has the world ever been made? And was there anything before it was made? ... As I pondered without ceasing these and such like questions – I know not whence arising – I had such bitter grief, that, becoming pale, I wasted away.

Pseudo-Clement of Rome, *Klementia*, 1.1–1.2.1.

### From Clement's Distress ...

Distressed, bitter, wasted away. This is how the young pagan protagonist, Clement of Rome, enters the *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative. The *Pseudo-Clementines* is a name given to a cluster of texts which comprises several traditions of this late-ancient narrative. This narrative is presented as an autobiographical account of the young Roman citizen. The two main fourth-century traditions are the *Klementia* (*Klem.*) or *Homilies* (*Hom.*) and the *Recognitions* (*Rec.*). The latter, however, is preserved only as an adapted Latin translation, with the exception of a number of Greek fragments, redacted by Rufinus of Aquileia in the early fifth century.<sup>1</sup> The *Klementia* or *Homilies* is preserved in Greek and divided into twenty books equally termed *Homilies*. Also a Syriac version that seems to incorporate parts of both traditions has been preserved. One manuscript that preserves a version of this Syriac tradition, *British Library Add. 12,150*, is particularly significant, as it provides the oldest textual witness of the *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative, dated to 411 AD.<sup>2</sup> Most scholars agree that these extant versions are rewritings of a hypothetical third-century *Basic Writing* (in German *Grundschrift*, and in French *L'Écrit de Base*): a theory that has inspired many scholars to study and harmonize the several extant *Pseudo-Clementine* traditions to discern the nature of this *Grundschrift*, or of even older sources underlying it.

According to Eusebian tradition, Clement is Peter's third successor as bishop of Rome,<sup>3</sup> though the *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative largely omits this episode of Clement's life. Only a brief reference to his appointment as

<sup>1</sup> Rehm and Strecker, *Die Pseudoklementinen I*.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, *The Syriac Pseudo-Clementines*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *HE* 5.6.2–4; see also Irenaeus of Lyons, *AH* 3.3.

successor to Peter in Rome appears in Clement's introductory letter to the *Klementia*, addressed to James, bishop of Jerusalem (sections 1–2). The narrative does not mention Clement's death and martyrdom in Chersonesos, present-day Crimea, where he was reportedly tied to an anchor and thrown into the Black Sea. This detail forms part of another fourth-century writing, the *Acta Clementis*.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Pseudo-Clementines*, a homodiegetic ego-narrator, Clement, grapples with doubts about the soul's immortality and the cosmos' infinity. He languishes to such extent that he develops a pallid complexion before finally embarking upon a quest for insight into the true nature of the soul and cosmos. Time and again, he faces disappointment in encounters with magicians and philosophical teachers, who fail to provide the truth he seeks, offering only eristic performance and *dissensus philosophorum*.

One day, Clement overhears an individual preaching about the "True Prophet," a title given to Jesus in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. This Prophet is said to perform miracles in Judea, proclaim the coming Kingdom of God, and reveal the nature of the immortal soul. Intrigued, Clement sets off from Rome to Judea to witness this Prophet with his own eyes. This journey invites the reader to closely accompany him across the Mediterranean. After setting sail for Judea, Clement first arrives in Alexandria,<sup>5</sup> where he debates several philosophers on matters of the divine, truth, and dialectics. There, he encounters Barnabas, a colleague of Peter, who tells him more about the True Prophet and invites him to the port city of Caesarea Stratonis. Here, the distressed young Roman is initiated as a disciple and, eventually, as Peter's successor. Portrayed as the True Prophet's most esteemed student, Peter relieves Clement of his uncertainty and stress regarding the soul and cosmos by introducing him to the teachings of the True Prophet Jesus, who had already died by the time Clement reached Caesarea. Clement writes down – as per request by Peter – the story of his quest for truth, Peter's highly original teachings on humankind, the soul, the cosmos, and God, and details of the apostle's many disputes with Simon Magus. In this narrative, Simon Magus surpasses his portrayal in the Acts of the Apostles (8:9–25) and assumes the status of main opponent and symbolic heretic of early Christianity.<sup>6</sup> These

<sup>4</sup> See also Zosimus *Ep.* 2 (P.L. XX, 650). For the reference in Clement's *Passio*, written at the end of the fifth century, see P. G. I, 1053, note 52.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Recognitions*, he meets Barnabas in Rome (*Rec.* I.7–11), after which he travels towards Caesarea.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Haar, *Simon Magus*; Bremmer, "Simon Magus," 246–270; De Vos, "Paideia, Plato's Sophist," 187–222.

confrontations between Peter and Simon do not concern the subject of magic, but rather focus on extensive expositions and dialectical discussions about God's nature and creation, in addition to the subjects of knowledge, education, and *paideia*. *Paideia* is not simply education, but rather refers to the process of education; the role of rhetoric, philosophy, and literature; the end result of culture; and thus, even the defining aspect of social and cultural identity. As I discuss in depth later on, *paideia* is key to the *Klementia*, and the intellectual exchanges between the main protagonists distinguish this tradition from other early Christian traditions in which these encounters occur, such as the *Apocryphal Acts of Peter*,<sup>7</sup> but also from other *Pseudo-Clementine* traditions due to the more prominent and sophisticated role of *paideia*. The *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative thus presents a distinctive portrayal of a young man's religious–philosophical quest for truth and the ultimate philosophical relief regarding his epistemological and existential distress by means of a reconsideration of *paideia*.

Clement's life story also involves distress over his family, from whom he was separated at a young age. His mother Mattidia, brothers Aquila and Nicetas, and father Faustus were estranged due to a series of unfortunate events. Only in the second part of the narrative does the reader learn that Mattidia's brother-in-law had tried to seduce her, prompting her to fabricate a dream to escape, with her two older sons, to Athens to avoid shaming her husband's family. A subsequent shipwreck left Mattidia on the island of Aradus, with her children sold as slaves and later adopted by the Jewish woman Justa (cf. *Klem.* 13.7).<sup>8</sup> Receiving no news of his family, the father searched for them but found himself lost in the eastern Mediterranean. Clement, the youngest son, was left alone in Rome. With Peter's help, whom Clement considers a foster-parent, the eponymous hero is later reunited with his family. The *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative presents an original framework of several recognition scenes, leading it to be called the first – and only surviving – Christian novel from the earliest centuries, or at least a Christian response to Greek novelistic prose fiction.

Before further defining this literature, its context, and this Element's objectives, it should be noted that its unique literary character, narrative structure, and original religious–philosophical content have sparked

<sup>7</sup> For an overall comparison of these encounters between Peter and Simon, see Côté, *Le thème de l'opposition*, 135–253; for an insightful discussion regarding the *Actus Vercellenses* in combination with the *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative, see Filippini, “Atti apocrifi petrini,” 17–41.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Justa in relation to the Syrophoenician woman from *Mark* 7:25–30 and *Matt.* 15:21–28, see Forger, “Interpreting the Syrophoenician Woman,” 132–166.

considerable debate. This pertains, among other aspects, to the precise definition of the “Christian” nature of the *Pseudo-Clementines*. As I discuss in this Element, we are dealing with original reflections of a late-ancient, Judaizing author contemplating the role of Jesus as a prophet and the dialogue between different expressions of Judaism and Christianity. For the sake of clarity, I refer to the *Pseudo-Clementines* as “Christian” fiction, although I emphasize that the *Klementia* should be understood as a particularly original and far from marginal fourth-century expression, in which the author clearly presents Moses and Jesus as incarnations of the True Prophet proclaiming the same truth, self-identifies not as Christian but as *Iudaios* and *theosebès*, and engages deeply with the hermeneutics of both Scripture and Gospel traditions. The precise nature of “Christian” and “Jewish-Christian” has led to extensive discussions among scholars and has had implications across various fields of research. Some scholars have even felt the need to apologize when addressing the *Pseudo-Clementines* from a historicizing perspective, due to the many methodological issues regarding this literature.

### ... to Scholarly Distress: Our Sincere Apologies!

We particularly observe this tendency in studies on the history of Christianity and Judaism, where distinct views on the narrative have largely been approached in terms of its potential historical value regarding hypothetical older layers of (Jewish-)Christian theories underlying the extant versions. In the first of his two lectures delivered at Trinity College Dublin in 1901, the theologian and, at that time, professor of Dogmatic Theology at King’s College London, Arthur C. Headlam, remarked:

Some apology is I think due for asking your attention to a subject which is only a bypath of Church history. My excuse must be that when I received the kind invitation of your Divinity Professors, the Clementine literature happened to be the work on which I was engaged; and although in my opinion this literature is out of the current of the main Church life, and although, as Prof. Harnack insists, it has had little influence on the development of Christian doctrine or life, yet it has been raised into adventitious importance by much modern speculation, and it is necessary for every investigator of early Christianity to decide for himself what historical value these documents may possess.<sup>9</sup>

Thirteen years earlier, Adolf Harnack – to whom Headlam refers – downplayed the pivotal value of the *Pseudo-Clementine* corpus (specifically

<sup>9</sup> Headlam, “The Clementine Literature,” 41.

the *Klementia*), as assigned earlier by Ferdinand Christian Baur. Baur and the Tübingen School regarded the *Klementia* as an important early Christian witness (dated to the second century on his account) of his dialectical theory that second-century Christianity represented a synthesis of two factions. On one side, he approached Peter's character as a *persona* of the original "Petrine," law-observing Jewish-Christian party and, on the other, he linked Simon Magus' character to the "Pauline," law-rejecting, gentile-Christian faction.<sup>10</sup> According to Harnack,<sup>11</sup> however, the *Pseudo-Clementines* contributed absolutely nothing to the field of the history of early Christianity or the development of the Catholic Church. This rather negative view of the corpus' historical value seemingly caused some embarrassment for Headlam. Later scholars, too, expressed hesitation about the historical value of the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature, often feeling the need to justify their interest in it. About sixty years later, Walter Ullmann, then a Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge, wrote about the historical-theological significance of the *Epistola Clementis*, one of the three introductory writings of the *Klementia*. Ullmann, too, felt compelled to apologize for his choice of subject. The explicit reason given for this apology relates to the copious volume of secondary literature that had already appeared regarding the *Pseudo-Clementines*:

The choice of this subject may well cause some surprise: What – another discussion of the Pseudo-Clementines? Can, with our present-day knowledge, anything be usefully added that has not already been said in the copious literature on the cluster of problems surrounding this novelistic product?<sup>12</sup>

Before I myself feel obliged to apologize for offering yet another discussion on this literature, it should be noted that Ullmann expressed the discomfort that he had (or at least pretended to have) in considering this literature as theological work and "novelistic product," as well as in considering its value within the fields of church history, theology, and the history of religion. The unique theories expressed by Peter's character, particularly in the Greek *Klementia*, such as the theory that false pericopes corrupted the original oral Mosaic Law with God's approval (e.g., *Klem.* 2.38; 2.51), that God created the Evil One by mixing the four basic elements (*Klem.* 19.12; 20.8), the emphatic silence on the crucifixion and resurrection, and

<sup>10</sup> Baur, "Die Christuspartei," 61–206.

<sup>11</sup> Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, 264–270.

<sup>12</sup> Ullmann, "The Significance of the *Epistola Clementis*," 295; cf. Ullmann, "Some Remarks," 330.

the portrayal of Jesus as one of the manifestations of the True Prophet (along with Adam and Moses; *Klem.* 1.47), in addition to the absence of the term *Χριστιανός* [*Christianós*] in the *Klementia*,<sup>13</sup> quickly led the corpus to be labelled unorthodox and reduced to the status of marginal work. The theologian and Church of England clergyman, Charles Bigg, even wrote in poetic, almost ominous, terms about the “sect” from which the *Klementia* were thought to have originated:

When the Light of the World had arisen they turned aside after the  
 marsh-fires of an idle antiquated mysticism and a gross and barbarous  
 superstition and so fell deeper and deeper into the mire.<sup>14</sup>

Bigg sharply criticized the seriousness of some theological–philosophical doctrines in the *Klementia*, particularly the idea of God having an anthropomorphic, corporeal form and six infinite extensions (*Klem.* 17.9.3–4), which he considered “the farthest point in the realm of nonsense ever reached by any human being.”<sup>15</sup> While I approach this work from a literary–critical and philosophical perspective, earlier theological research, considering the *Clementines* as a rather marginal expression, has nevertheless significantly influenced later perspectives on this work in scholarship on the Greek novel, ancient rhetoric, and ancient philosophy. I argue that the *Pseudo-Clementine* narrative has not yet been sufficiently appreciated as an original expression of Christian fiction. Headlam, for instance, called the hypothetical *Grundschrift*’s author “a curious, versatile, unequally developed mind” from the late second or early third century. He noted that:

[a]s a story the work was a success, as a contribution to serious thought it was a failure. Harnack is right in setting it aside in working out the development of Christian thought. ... The Clementine literature is outside the current of Church life.<sup>16</sup>

The biblical scholar and (at that time) Episcopalian priest, Richard Pervo, unlike Headlam, characterized the long-winded storyline and drawn-out disputes of the *Pseudo-Clementines* as “a smear-piece no less dreadful than it is tedious.”<sup>17</sup> This view stemmed from the *Quellenkritik* approach, which has dominated *Pseudo-Clementine* research for many decades, even centuries. Scholars have focused on identifying hypothetical older, literary, philosophical, and (Jewish-)Christian sources from the first and second

<sup>13</sup> Except for *Rec.* IV.20.4, a passage which could have been inserted by Rufinus himself.

<sup>14</sup> Bigg, “The Clementine Homilies,” 192.

<sup>15</sup> Bigg, “The Clementine Homilies,” 163.

<sup>16</sup> Headlam, “The Clementine Literature,” 58.

<sup>17</sup> Pervo, “The Ancient Novel,” 707.

centuries, or in other words, traces of early (Jewish-)Christian doctrines beyond the narrative façade, rather than approaching the extant third- and fourth-century *Pseudo-Clementine* versions in their own right. This extensive excavation, diverse opinions about the often-hypothetical sources, and lack of any final conclusion have often led researchers to positions of confusion when conducting *Pseudo-Clementine* scholarship. In 1888, Adolf Harnack summarized these problematic issues in a single sentence that “auf diesem Gebiete nicht weniger als Alles noch im Dunkeln liegt” (“in this field, nothing less than everything remains in darkness”),<sup>18</sup> among which regarding the composition of the corpus. More than 100 years ago, the biblical scholar Rendel Harris also stated that “[a]mongst the problems there is none that rivals in perplexity and obscurity the question of the origin of the so-called Pseudo-Clementine literature.”<sup>19</sup> In 1958, the historian of religion, Hans Joachim Schoeps, even considered the biblical *Quellenkritik* as child’s play (*ein Kinderspiel*) compared to research into the *Pseudo-Clementines*.<sup>20</sup>

This problematic terrain, reinforced by academic compartmentalization, has deeply influenced studies in ancient narrative, especially the ancient novel, and early and late-ancient Christian literature. A review of general reference works on ancient narrative, Greek prose fiction, and Jewish and Christian narrative reveals that the *Pseudo-Clementines* have often been neglected or insufficiently discussed, primarily treated from a historical perspective. Mark J. Edwards’ 1992 comment that the *Pseudo-Clementines* “are treated all too frequently as material for historians, not for critics,” unfortunately remains relevant today.<sup>21</sup>

This focus on historical value relates to the term “pseudo,” as the narrative, created only in the third and fourth centuries, is not considered an authentic autobiographical writing by Clement of Rome.<sup>22</sup> Recently, scholars have argued, with good reason, to advance the simpler denomination *Clementina*. This debate reflects an underlying lack of consensus on the genre, approach, and disciplinary focus of the text. Nonetheless, as this Element discusses, significant value remains in studying it as an original Christian and philosophical narrative that engages with and positions itself in narrative tradition to which expressions of Greek erotic prose also belong.

<sup>18</sup> Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, 265–266.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, “Notes,” 125.

<sup>20</sup> Schoeps, “Die Pseudoklementinen,” 4.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, “The *Clementina*,” 459.

<sup>22</sup> See already Epiphanius’ view in his *Panarion*, 26.16 and 30.15.1.

This Element does not address whether the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature renders a mere *fictive* narrative or whether all possible hypothetical sources can be distilled. Instead, we shall raise alternative questions concerning its literary character and rhetorical dynamics, particularly its strategies of veracity and credibility. The Greek *Klementia* in particular provides sufficient markers of fictionality, guiding educated ancient readers towards make-believe.<sup>23</sup> This concept refers to a set of hermeneutical techniques within the texts and to how they impact the reader response dynamic, establishing complex relations to truth, as can also be observed in so-called Greek novelistic prose fiction, such as Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* and Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Cleitophon*. These novels simultaneously encourage belief in the world as created and signal in sophisticated manner the artificiality of this same world. The same, I argue, occurs in the *Klementia*, shaping expectations about the ways in which the work was intended to be read, or, in other words, the *hermeneutics of reading*. I would like to clarify that the dynamics of the relationship between encouraging belief in the world as created and confronting its artificiality might differ in the case of a novel attributed to a historical Christian figure and martyr compared to that of the Greek novel and its fictional characters. However, the complexity of the reading hermeneutics, their strategies, and the presence of features in the *Pseudo-Clementines* that are also strongly present in the Greek novels provide a compelling basis for comparison regarding the notion of fiction. By paying attention to these strategies, we can better analyze the different techniques deployed by the *Klementinist* to present Christian prose, how the reader is anticipated to react to these strategies regarding truth and belief of and within the work, the notion of storytelling, and the hermeneutics of fiction in general, which have so far been neglected by strictly historical approaches.

In recent decades, there have been several calls for new approaches: not only in the field of the history of Christianity and Judaism, but also in literary studies about the ancient novel and early Christian and Jewish narratives. Recently, Stanley F. Jones noted: "When the *Klementia* is compared with other New Testament apocryphal literature, the author's quite exceptional literary abilities cannot be overlooked."<sup>24</sup> It is high time the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature receives its deserved attention from literary and philosophical critics alike. This Element addresses the need for

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, "Make Believe," 175–229.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, "Introduction to the *Pseudo-Clementines*," 36.

*Pseudo-Clementine* studies within these fields of ancient narrative, ancient novel, and Jewish and Christian narratives, by focusing on the original literary qualities and fictional strategies of the Greek *Klementia*.

### Objectives of This Element

First and foremost, storytelling and the hermeneutics of interpreting stories shall represent a key focus of our attention. The Greek tradition, more than other *Pseudo-Clementine* versions, engages with storytelling on multiple levels. Its protagonists share stories about their lives, deceive through fabricated stories, and recognize each other through these stories. Clear reflections are offered on the truth of narratives and stories and, moreover, on the hermeneutics of interpreting them. This occurs not only on the level of the characters' own memories and life stories and their interpretation by other characters but also on a meta-discursive level, where the reader is provided with a hermeneutical framework for interpreting storytelling and narrative traditions. Peter thus discusses distinct renderings and interpretations of the Scriptures and the notion that false pericopes exist within the written Mosaic Law. One must be aware of these false pericopes in order to correctly interpret the Scriptures. Implicitly, the *Klementia* also offers reinterpretations of Gospel traditions through Peter's discussions and teachings. On a meta-narrative level, passages about Clement's autobiography enter into a hypertextual relationship with Platonic myths,<sup>25</sup> including the Phaedran myth of the charioteer (245c–249d) and the Myth of Er from the *Republic* (614–621). These hypotexts provide insight into how these passages require interpretation by the reader. Similar meta-narrative engagement can also be observed in relation to certain expressions of Greek novelistic prose, notably Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* and Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Cleitophon*. Several recognition scenes in the *Klementia* display hypertextual and meta-literary relationships with these novels and, more generally, with the tradition of Greek erotic prose, and offer additional reflections on the *Klementinist's* insights into Christian storytelling and the related fictional aspect. These relationships are expected to be identified and interpreted by well-trained readers versed in relevant intricacies of storytelling and proper hermeneutics.

<sup>25</sup> In this case, I follow Genette's definition of *intertextuality* as the relationship between textual witnesses by means of allusions and quotations, as well his discussion of the dynamics of *hypertextuality*, *hypotexts*, and *hypertexts*. Hypertextuality refers to any relationship that connects a text B (the hypertext) to a prior text A (the hypotext), in a manner that is not that of commentary (Genette, *Palimpsests*, sp. 1–6; Allen, *Intertextuality*, 104–111).

Second, I shall elaborate on the readership, particularly the *implied reader*, as well as their relationship to strategies of fiction and belief in and of the work. Drawing on Wolfgang Iser's aesthetic reader-response criticism,<sup>26</sup> I examine how the *Klementinist* text prompts the reader to consider moral, cultural, and meta-literary issues. The *implied reader* differs from any *actual reader*, "who may be unable or unwilling to occupy the position of the implied reader."<sup>27</sup> A key expectation of the *implied reader* regards the cultural capital of *paideia* itself, requiring the reader to hold *pepaideumenos* status. I argue that the *Klementia*, more than other *Pseudo-Clementine* versions, addresses what it means to be (Jewish-)Christian in relation to Greek *paideia*, particularly in terms of Greek culture, education, and *Bildung*. The reader is confronted with several assumptions regarding literature, fiction, and truth when reading Greek prose fiction, a point which is questioned within the *Klementia*. These assumptions, moreover, are linked to reflections on culture and education, therefore representing *paideia*. The *Klementinist* does not simply reject Greek *paideia* but redefines it from within as *pepaideumenos*, expressed on a literary, rhetorical, and philosophical level, alongside religious considerations. The presence of Plato's dialogues and references to Greek novelistic prose are intended for recognition by the reader, in addition to reinterpretations of Scripture and Gospel tradition. This Element shall, through detailed example, scrutinize Christian storytelling and explore what exactly is involved in the correct interpretation of Christian prose fiction as a redefined *pepaideumenos*. In reconsidering *paideia*, Greek cultural capital, and the accompanying reflections on prose literature and fiction, it becomes clear that the *Klementinist* exploits hypertextuality and meta-literary reflections on Greek novelistic fiction in order to evoke these reconsiderations of storytelling, interpretive hermeneutics, and one's role as a culturally Greek reader-*pepaideumenos*. A key concept here involves the distinctive condition of "de-Greekness" (ἀφελληνισθῆναι; *Klem.* 13.9), exploring what it means (not) to write, read, and interpret Christian prose as *pepaideumenos*.

Case studies of the *Klementia* invite us to delve deeper into the notion of Christian fiction and storytelling. The *Klementinist* narrative framework has often been considered as "adopted" from non-Christian novels.

<sup>26</sup> Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*.

<sup>27</sup> Baldick, "Implied Reader," 123. There are several references to the *Pseudo-Clementines* by contemporary and later, *actual readers* (such as Eusebius, Epiphanius, Photius), primarily concerning the question of whether this testimony was indeed authored by Clement of Rome himself. However, these discussions often remain brief and it is, at times, difficult to pinpoint to which particular tradition of the *Pseudo-Clementine* they are referring.