

## I

## Introduction

*A Christian among Roman Miscellanists*

It must be confessed that Clement of Alexandria's literary form in the *Stromateis* has found few admirers. Many scholars who have written on him have begun with an apologia for their choice of topic, and one of the things that they have routinely bemoaned is his literary form. 'The *Stromateis* is easily his masterpiece of rambling obscurity', wrote Robert Casey, adding that 'the value of the book, therefore, lies in its ideas'.<sup>1</sup> Eugène de Faye acknowledged, 'Unfortunately, the study of Clement of Alexandria is extremely arduous. His writings are hard to read and often dull. The length and endless digressions obscure his thought. In addition, his style is generally turgid and diffuse ...'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Johannes Munck observed, 'Clement of Alexandria cannot lay claim to any great interest. He himself took pains to bring that about, inasmuch as he wrote for the few ... Only a patient person, who does not suffer fatigue, will benefit.'<sup>3</sup>

And yet, the one thing that we know about Clement's literary form, which could help make sense of it in relation to other ancient works, has never been properly studied, namely, that he was adapting a genre of his pagan contemporaries. It is well-recognised that the form of the

<sup>1</sup> Casey 1925, 70.

<sup>2</sup> De Faye 1906, 2, 'malheureusement l'étude de Clément d'Alexandrie est extrêmement ardue. Ses écrits sont d'une lecture pénible, souvent fastidieuse. Des longueurs et des digressions interminables obscurcissent sa pensée. Ajoutez que son style est en général lourd et diffus ...'.

<sup>3</sup> Munck 1933, 1, 'Klemens Alexandrinus kann auf kein grösseres Interesse Anspruch erheben. Dafür hat er selbst Sorge getragen, indem er für die Wenigen schrieb ... Nur der Geduldige, der nicht ermüdet, wird belohnt.' Similarly: Mondésert 1949 (= SC 2), 5–8; Völker 1952, 12–14.

*Stromateis* owes much to contemporary pagan ‘miscellany’ literature. But rather than interrogating Clement’s reception of Classical ‘miscellanism’, scholars have repeatedly stated that Clement was somehow ‘different’ from the pagan authors whom he was imitating. André Méhat, who wrote the fullest study of the literary form of the *Stromateis* in the twentieth century, suggested that the similarities were only superficial; ‘within this literature’, he said, the *Stromateis* ‘occupy a place apart’,<sup>4</sup> such that they had better be compared with such later works as Augustine’s *Civitas Dei*, and Montaigne’s *Essais*.<sup>5</sup> Méhat’s emphasis on Clement’s Christian difference chimed with scholarship both prior<sup>6</sup> and subsequent to his work; in the surge of research interest in Classical miscellanism at the end of the twentieth century, Clement never received close attention: one pagan ‘miscellanist’ after another became the subject of investigation, but Clement was left out. He was always bracketed separately as somehow ‘different’.

The trope of Christian difference has thus become a rhetorical commonplace in modern scholarship, which has put a stop to conversation about Clement’s relation to Classical miscellanism before anyone has closely interrogated his similarities and differences from pagan authors, or sought to understand how he was working within a Classical culture of miscellany-making. The only partial exceptions of which I am aware are two outstanding doctoral theses in Classics, by Lawrence Emmett (2001) and Stuart Thomson (2014) respectively. Both authors took seriously the idea that Clement was operating within the rhetorical culture of his day. Both critiqued the lack of attention to Christian texts in modern study of the Second Sophistic.<sup>7</sup> However, neither of their dissertations has yet been published, and both authors are currently working outside academia.<sup>8</sup>

The present book addresses the need for a better understanding of Clement’s relation to Classical miscellanism. I suggest that this can contribute to three overlapping conversations.

Firstly, within the study of Clement, there is a long tradition of reading him alongside Greek and Roman philosophers to interpret his ideas, but

<sup>4</sup> Méhat 1966, 523, ‘à l’intérieur de cette littérature, ils occupent une place à part’.

<sup>5</sup> Méhat 1966, 525, 527.      <sup>6</sup> E.g., Munck 1933, 76–77; Pohlenz 1943, 121.

<sup>7</sup> The problems with the name ‘Second Sophistic’ have often been rehearsed: the expression stems from Philostratus, but it has become a modern technical term that is used with diverse referents – for a period, a culture, a style of literature. Alternative names, such as ‘Greek renaissance’ and ‘Postclassicism’, carry different baggage of unwanted associations. See, e.g., Whitmarsh 2001, 42–45; 2005, 4–10; 2013, 1–5.

<sup>8</sup> Emmett 2001; Thomson 2014. See further below, pp. 16–17.

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when his literary form has been studied, questions of structure have been prioritised, drawing on evidence internal to his corpus. It is characteristic of philosophical strands of Theology and of Classics alike to assume that one can study ideas apart from the literary form in which they are articulated (as Casey implied in the comment quoted above, that the ‘value’ of the *Stromateis* ‘lies in their ideas’); but this separation fails to respect the relationship between form and function in literature. Paying more attention to formal features of a literary work can help us better to understand both the ideas themselves (for modes of expression are integral to what is communicated)<sup>9</sup> and their social purpose (for literary forms are not disembodied vehicles of spiritual ideas, but embodied things that affect people in the social context of a particular literary culture).<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, since the topic of Clement’s miscellanism currently falls at the intersection between the scholarly disciplines of Patristics (where Clement is traditionally studied) and Classics (where Roman miscellanism has been researched), the attempt to read Clement among Roman miscellanists often discloses issues that have hindered interdisciplinary dialogue in the past. This is an area of current disciplinary shifts, as recent years have witnessed a significant growth in conferences, publications and syllabi that have sought to overcome the historic divisions between Classics and Theology. The foundation of university disciplines, programmes and curricula in Early Christian Studies and in Late Antiquity has provided one mode of reinventing the study of Roman and Christian antiquity in all its aspects.<sup>11</sup> The widely read online journal, *BMCR*, now frequently publishes reviews of books on ancient Christian and Jewish themes, where once it was devoted to Classical scholarship alone. The *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* has been established to ‘examine the ways in which the Greco-Roman world was the world of the New Testament and early Judaism’.<sup>12</sup> In this setting, a closer study of Clement of Alexandria among Roman miscellanists may provide a better understanding of some of the sticking points in interdisciplinary dialogue, and hopefully suggest ways beyond them.

Thirdly, the enquiry into Clement’s literary form may also contribute to current debates about early Christian textuality. Scholarship in recent years has drawn attention to the lively culture of Christian experimentation with different modes of textuality during this period. Indeed Christians were some of the most innovative participants in

<sup>9</sup> Lavery and Groarke 2010. <sup>10</sup> Goldhill 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Brakke 2002; Clark 2008; Vessey 2008. <sup>12</sup> [www.jgrchj.net/current](http://www.jgrchj.net/current).

contemporary book culture, as witnessed, for example, by their early adoption of the codex, their use of *nomina sacra*, the emergence of a ‘gospel’ genre, and the idea of a ‘four-formed gospel’.<sup>13</sup> Questions such as what scripture was, who could compose it and how, were still open to interpretation.<sup>14</sup> In this setting, Clement presents us with an unprecedented literary experiment when he produces a Christian interpretation of Classical miscellany-making within a longer literary project in Christian formation. In antiquity, he soon became known among Christians as ‘the Stromatist’, underscoring that what he had done in his ‘stromatic’ work stood out even to ancient readers.<sup>15</sup> Both the Christian character of his work, and its relation to the Classical tradition, deserve fuller study.

How to approach this raises several issues, which will be addressed more fully in Chapters 2–4. However, it may be helpful to anticipate the lengthier discussion by highlighting two aspects of my method and approach that may need a word of comment.

Firstly, at a formal level, we must take into account not only that the *Stromateis* is a miscellany, but also that it is not a stand-alone work, but the third in a stepped sequence within a literary programme in Christian formation. This claim has been widely accepted in modern scholarship, but has rarely informed the way in which Clement is studied. Many scholars pick just one of Clement’s major extant works to engage with, or else they systematise his ideas without exploring his sequential presentation of them. But if the *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, *Stromateis* and *Hypotyposes* were intended to constitute a programme of Christian formation by sequential reading, then we cannot understand the *Stromateis* in isolation from its context within Clement’s longer literary project.

The present book therefore attempts to engage with the full sequence in so far as it is extant: most chapters will discuss how the Christianisation of miscellany motifs in the *Stromateis* develops what came before in the *Protrepticus* and the *Paedagogus*, as the next step in Christian formation within Clement’s work. This makes for a lengthy discussion at times, but I felt it was necessary for understanding the literary shape of Clement’s project, especially in a research context where this way of studying Clement has often been neglected. However, I have limited my attention to the parts of the project that are largely extant, that is, *Protrepticus*,

<sup>13</sup> Reed 2002; Mitchell 2006; Heath 2010; Watson 2013; Kloppenborg 2014; Crawford 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Markschies 2003; 2007; Brakke 2012; Kreps 2016. <sup>15</sup> Méhat 1966, 98 n. 14.

*Paedagogus*, *Stromateis* I–VII, without attempting to piece together the fragments of *Str.* VIII or the *Hypotypoesis*, which have been well studied by others in recent years.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, in approaching Clement's project in relation to the wider culture of Classical miscellanism, I have found it necessary to recur to a sample of the best-known Classical miscellanists, in order to put the comparative study of Clement's miscellanism on a concrete evidential basis. Plutarch's *Table Talk*, Pliny's *Natural History*, Gellius' *Attic Nights* and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* are frequently cited in modern studies of Classical miscellanism; in this book, they have been made case studies for comparison with Clement's approach.

This comparative method brings to the discussion table authors who are usually kept apart in the modern academy, as they have been portioned out between the disciplines of Classics and Theology. The consequences of treating them together may frustrate some readers: parts of the book acquire a somewhat miscellanistic quality by the juxtaposition of different authors, and at times the argument is slowed down with close study of aspects of Classical miscellanies that turn out to work rather differently in Clement. Parts (but not all) of the Classical material discussed here are well-known within the field of Classics, and readers from that discipline may wish to skim through those sections quickly. Conversely, at times I have given more introduction to issues within Clement scholarship than Patristics scholars may need, because of the hope that some Classicists may also read this work.

I have found working with particular case studies important to the argument for several reasons: firstly, the genre of 'miscellany' is a modern and potentially nebulous construct, therefore it is important to work with particular examples in order to be sure that our discussion is grounded in evidence; secondly, 'miscellanies' are very diverse among themselves, so if we are to interrogate the trope of 'Christian difference', then we must give a viewpoint that allows the differences among Classical miscellanies to emerge as well; thirdly, the fact that these Classical authors have never been much discussed in relation to Clement means that for many Clement scholars, at least, it will be helpful to present a fuller account, even when parts of it may be familiar to Classical readers.

The book begins with three introductory chapters. Chapter 2 shows why and how the topic of Clement's miscellany-making fell into the

<sup>16</sup> For a fuller defence of this approach, see below, pp. 49–52, 60–62 and [Appendix](#).

cracks between Classics and Theology in the modern academy, and why further investigation is now timely. Chapter 3 explores definitions of miscellanism in order to discover the best method for studying Clement. It argues that we should begin from Clement's reception of characteristic tropes of literary miscellanism, and compare his literary project with individual miscellanists as case studies. Chapter 4 sketches some of the social and institutional contexts associated with miscellanism in the Classical world, in order to give a sense of why Clement would engage with this literary culture at all, and how his Christian Alexandrian context could have affected the conditions for participation in this mode of writing.

The next three chapters (Chapters 5–7) focus on widely recognised genre markers of Classical miscellanism: Chapter 5 looks at the intertwined issues of how the author presents himself as a miscellanist, how he presents his miscellanies and how they are intended to function for his readers; Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the titles, with their associated imageries, which are typical of this literature, including the titles that miscellanists choose for their works (Chapter 6) and the literary device of listing titles of other people's miscellanies (Chapter 7). Each of these topics has been significant in studies of Classical miscellanism, and in observing Clement's 'Christian difference' in the past. By juxtaposing Clement's approach with four case studies in Classical miscellanism – Plutarch, Pliny, Gellius and Athenaeus – we are able to get a better perspective both on the nature and the degree of Clement's 'difference'. His miscellanism is not necessarily more *different* than any one Classical miscellanist is from any of the others. The interest lies in Clement's Christian interpretation of the literary form.

In these chapters, we see that he perceives his miscellanistic vocation as a call from the Lord to compile such notes as may benefit listeners who participate in the liturgy and collective life of the church. He prepares to take up this calling through self-examination and prayer for cleansing in spirit, and he portrays the climax of his own educational pilgrimage as coming to rest with a scriptural miscellanist, whom he could love chastely and intimately in Egypt. The titles of the works in his literary project are made the subject of reflection within his text. He seeks to show how the protreptic and pedagogical roles of God are discovered in scripture, and through them to put people in a relation to the voice of the Lord. With the name *Stromateis*, he chooses a deliberately clichéd miscellany title and engages with it in such a way as to point the readers beyond the word to the deity who lies beyond the text. When he draws attention to miscellany

titles that he does *not* choose, he directs his readers' attention to themes in his imagery that provide Hellenised points of access to his Christian doctrine.

The three following chapters (Chapters 8–10) belong closely together as a response to Clement's emphasis on 'hiddenness', which has often been treated in scholarship as *both* the reason that he chose the miscellany genre *and* the issue that sets him apart from Classical miscellanies. It has been claimed that Clement had something to hide, and his pagan counterparts did not, and that Clement's attempt to hide things through miscellanism was an imitation of Scripture hiding things through aenigma. In these three chapters, I argue that hiddenness is a much more wide-ranging imagistic discourse than has been recognised in previous scholarship, and it points readers to the divine economy of hiddenness and revelation in which his work participates. In the Classical world, the miscellanists too participated in an economy of hiddenness and revelation through texts, but the deities that presided over it from their perspective were the Muses. Clement debunks and displaces the Muses from his literary frame. In their place, he has the Christ-Logos, who is his apian source of insight (Chapter 8). His so-called esoteric tropes point the reader to his imagistic discourse of hiddenness, by which he conveys that miscellanism is the typical and normative way of life for a gnostic within the immanent economy of divine hiddenness and revelation. God is the one who is hidden, and miscellanism involves selective appropriation and reordering of texts unto the rhetorical scopos and ethical telos that is made known in Christ (Chapter 9). Far from hiding some things from some readers, Clement aims to train as many readers as possible to 'listen in a hidden way' so as to discern that which is hidden, which is of God. He portrays this as a mystagogical curriculum: the mystery imagery resonates with the rhetoric of contemporary pagan educational literature. Clement seeks to initiate his readers not only in contemplative insight and practical ethics, but also in the textual practices of good miscellanism and the rhetorical exercises of good teaching. In the *Stromateis*, it is evident that he develops his theory and practice of miscellanism within a social context where other Christians were miscellanising too, such that they increasingly needed to debate and articulate rules for what constituted good and bad miscellanism. Clement's theory of miscellanism, however, is closely bound up with his Christian doctrine (Chapter 10).

Chapter 11 turns to Clement's miscellanistic aesthetic: *poikilia*. Having seen that he did not miscellanise for the pragmatic purpose of hiding some things from some readers, we are able to take a fresh look at Clement's

variegated form and recognise its intended *beauty*. However, this is not a beauty that is divorced from the True and the Good; even Classical miscellanists were often able to find meaning in the deliberate variety of this literary form; Clement develops this much further by highlighting a limited vocabulary of variegation – especially *poikilia* – and using it in different ways at different stages of his literary project. The *Protrepticus* cultivates a focus on the true God; the *Paedagogus* builds on this and fosters the readers' ethical simplicity to perceive the true God amidst all the varied distractions of social life; the *Stromateis*, intended for readers who have advanced through this prior formation, allow delight in the *poikilia* of variegated wisdom, which is divine, and in which Clement's own *poikilic* miscellanies participate.

Overall, this book shows that Clement's miscellanism is distinctively Christian, but in much more interesting and profound ways than has been appreciated before. Clement consistently reinterprets topoi and tropes of the Classical form through a Christian theological vision, and thus sets before his readers a project in formation that ultimately enables them at once to delight in the variegated beauty of God and to become ever more focused on the contemplation of the One Teacher, into whose likeness they are growing.



## Clement's Miscellanism and the Scholarly Trope of Christian Difference

Since the topic of the present book falls in the interstices between the disciplines of Classics and Theology, it is more than usually necessary to begin with an archaeology of the scholarly lacuna. Questions, methods and priorities in any discipline have a history, and while we may assume some measure of familiarity with these things in our own field, when we turn to an issue that straddles disciplines, we need to give a fuller account of the histories of debate and the reasons why debate has not happened across the disciplinary fence.

In this chapter, I will therefore sketch a brief history of scholarship on Clement of Alexandria and on Classical miscellanism, and highlight the issues that have obstructed previous examination of the relationship between the two. This will inform the way that I construct my argument and supposed interlocutors in the course of my book. Even though Classics and Theology have in many areas worked more closely together in recent years than they had for a long time, nonetheless, this particular debate has been bedevilled by a number of traditional stereotypes about 'Christian difference'.

### BEFORE MÉHAT (1966): MODERN NEGLECT OF CLASSICAL MISCELLANIES

Prior to the nineteenth century, Classical and Christian traditions of miscellanism were closely intertwined in European literary culture.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For continuities in the history of miscellanism prior to the nineteenth century, see also Morgan 2011; Fitzgerald 2016, 149–95.

It was unremarkable to list alongside each other Classical and Christian exponents of the genre<sup>2</sup> or playfully to Christianise Classical tropes of miscellanism.<sup>3</sup> However, with the advent of the nineteenth-century university, the relationship between Classics and Theology changed drastically, and so did attitudes towards ancient miscellanies. At a time when some intellectuals had been shaken out of their Christian convictions and were seeking alternative disciplines in which to pursue the study of antiquity, the creation of Classical Philology established an alternative disciplinary career path.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, hitherto well-loved miscellanists, such as Gellius and others, were left off the Classical syllabus in prestigious universities; authors from ancient canons, such as Vergil, Horace, Cicero and Livy, were prioritised over imperial miscellanists in forming the modern ‘canon’ of Classical authors; literature of the early empire came to be widely regarded as degenerate.<sup>5</sup> This situation persisted well into the twentieth century, and shaped the way in which Clement’s oeuvre was handled – or overlooked.

In Patristics scholarship, there was considerable interest in Clement’s literary form in the first half of the twentieth century, but the focus was not his relationship to Classical miscellanies. Two issues dominated debate: first, the relationship between Clement’s extant works, and second, the question of whether the *Stromateis* had any structure at all. In 1898, Eugène De Faye argued that the *Stromateis* could not possibly have been the *Didaskalos* that Clement had planned.<sup>6</sup> Rather, it must be a mere afterthought, a mess, a draft in need of revision. De Faye’s work sparked much debate, but in 1966, André Méhat published what came to be regarded as the landmark study of the literary form of the *Stromateis*. Méhat laid much weight on Clement’s promise in his preface to present a ‘systematic layout of chapters’ (κεφαλαίων συστηματική ἔκθεσις, *Str.* I.i.14.2). The phrase only occurs once in Clement, and the chapters

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘miscellany’ as a book title dates to Politian’s *Miscellanea*, published in 1489. He listed Aelian, Gellius and Clement alongside each other as exempla of the genre that he was adopting for his work. See Thomson 2014, 92–93.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson 2003.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The most prudent thing a negative theologian can do is to change over to another faculty’, wrote Jakob Burckhardt, who switched to history: see Howard 2000, 124–36 (quotation from p. 136). Friedrich August Wolf, one of the founding fathers of Classical philology, enrolled as a student of philology rather than theology, against his teacher’s advice, and later excluded theology students from his seminars, as he sought to professionalise the Classics: Bolter 1980; Baertschi 2014, 234–35. On theology and the arts in general in the nineteenth century: Rüegg 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan 2011, 55–57. <sup>6</sup> De Faye 1906, 87–121.