

PHILOSOPHICAL AND TOPONYMIC REFLECTIONS

NEW LIGHTS ON THE APOCRYPHAL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SENECA AND THE APOSTLE PAUL

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Abstract: A subject that transcends time, the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and the Apostle Paul continues to represent a never-ending controversy. This is due to the dimension of the topic acquired over time, the breadth of interpretations and the ongoing analysis of the Letters. The present article makes an introduction that brings the reader up to date with the issue, after which, gradually, brings his attention to a synthesis of the correspondence between the two and introduces him to the historical, philological, philosophical and humanistic problems that arise from each letter independently.

Keywords: classical studies, philosophy, literature, Seneca, apocryphal writings.

INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, it is of great importance to emphasize why this topic is still of interest and why it is still up for debate; we are trying, as many did before, to shed some light in this rather controversial discussion on whether the correspondence between Seneca and the Apostle Paul was genuine or not. However, this is just a slight part of a greater image, there are disputes and disagreements concerning whether they ever met each other in person. Obviously, apart from the dissensions, the figures of the two are the main focus in this regard, taking into account that they were emblematic figures of their time and they have passed the threshold of it, becoming immortal for posterity.

Seneca was an influential character in the Roman Empire as political figure and one of the most important Stoic philosophers. His intellectual work is widely known and recognised for its intrinsic value, as well as for the influence generated on philosophy as a whole. His creation and life have made an unbounded contribution to the entire civilization and their echoes still produce a trembling of the soul and enrich wisdom.

The Apostle Paul is even beyond the level of notoriety as Seneca, considering that he is one of the focal characters in Christianity. He is the protagonist of the early

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propagation and crystallization of the Christian message, reaching Rome besides many other departures. Thus, his role in the entire process was undoubtedly relevant and meaningful, considering also his valuable epistolary texts.

We have several sources at our disposal in order to describe the characters of the two which eventually could help us develop the slightest relevant ideas for their common traits. They are various and quite different, thus it is not an easy task to run a thread between them. We do not possess a first-hand, detailed characterization of Seneca¹, but historians gave us as much information as we need to form a clear image of him. Moreover, his own writings – far more numerous than Paul’s – display a lot about his inner being. Besides this, not even from the *Acts of the Apostles* can we say a lot about Paul’s personality, because this is an area that it is *a priori* excluded as a consequence of a conducted interest in any other aspects, regarding moral stances, a meaningful content and so on. However, this does not mean that we could not draw some conclusions about his personality from the way he described and analysed things of his epoch – for instance, there are to be remarked his wisdom, his willingness to accomplish great things, his enthusiasm to bear the word of the Lord on his lips. More about their personalities will unfold next, especially when we talk about their correspondence.

Nowadays it is a widely spread and common thing that the correspondence between the Apostle Paul and Seneca was not an authentic one, considering various factors analysed by the historians and scientists preoccupied in the matter; this is mainly because they were dated in a relatively accurate manner as being written after the end of Seneca and the Apostle Paul’s lives.

Some authors² distinguish themselves from the rest at least by pointing out the fact that they first presume the correspondence is genuine and put it in the broader context of New Testament. In this regard, what *G.G. Gamba* firmly says is

“I propose a reading of it (*the correspondence*, author's note) starting from the conviction of its genuineness and consequently inserting it and interpreting it in the broader context of New Testament history and, more specifically, of the apostle Paul and the imperial character L. Anneo Seneca”.

Actually, this could be an interesting approach, considering that most of the authors concerned with the topic start from the idea that a relation between them did not exist at all due to the fact that many differences resided in their traits.

“Even with regard to the question whether they ever met each other there is a great divergence of opinion. Frequently the question is answered in the negative, or at the most the possibility of contact between them is deemed to be

¹ J.N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1961, p. 18.

² G.G. Gamba, *Il “Carteggio” tra L. Anneo Seneca e L’Apostolo Paolo. Proposta per una sua lettura contestuale*, Las, Roma, 2001, p. 5.

slight; however, sometimes it is thought that they met repeatedly and were even on very intimate terms”³.

What is to be remarked here is that they did not necessarily need to have met in person in order to have had contact. Other persons in their entourage could have helped with ensuring the communication between them. We should not forget that Seneca was an influential figure and the Apostle Paul had many followers at his side. Therefore, denying that they did not meet in person does not deny the existence of correspondence between them in any way. However, this is another topic to discuss about and will return to this later on.

The correspondence consists of only fourteen short letters, eight sent by L. Anneo Seneca to the Apostle (and to Theophilus: Letter VII) and six sent by Paul to L. Anneo Seneca (and to Lucilius: Letter VI), in particular circumstances of their lives⁴. Saint Jerome mentioned them in *De Viris Illustribus* (Chapter 12)⁵. In any case, this does not certify their validity, considering that they date from the fourth century, and Saint Jerome lived between the fourth and fifth centuries. Even Saint Augustine mentioned them at some point in the early fifth century. Is it possible then that they were rewritten in the fourth century after the original ones (if existed)? Maybe this is a wrong path to follow, considering that we should first analyse what these letters convey and whether their content seems authentic, beyond any formal issues.

FIRST RELEVANT ASPECTS

“Paul and Seneca lived at approximately the same time. Seneca was born at Corduba in Spain in 4 or 5 B.C., his suicide as a consequence of the conspiracy of Piso took place in A.D. 65. The dates of Paul’s birth and death are not known with accuracy, but are bound to have been at about the same time”⁶. This is an important statement, to which the author adds more: “they both lived in the same world of the Roman Empire”. Analysing these and several other ideas, a conclusion can be drawn: there are certain things – relevant ones – that *J.N. Sevenster* considers *things in common* in regards of their lives. These are confirmed by several historical sources, so they are considered to be true. They do not mean little, but on the contrary. Having Paul and Seneca, two outstanding and well known characters living in the approximately the same space and time is not an aspect to neglect. Because, first of all, we are trying to establish the premises of their potential connection. And these important aspects are in favour of their possible bond. Thus, we have the right premises.

³ J.N. Sevenster, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ G.G. Gamba, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵ J. Dodson, D. Briones (eds.), *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, p. 28.

⁶ J.N. Sevenster, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Moreover, *J.N. Sevenster* continues and this time he makes a few references to each other's writings:

“in another letter Seneca gives a lively description of the arrival of an Alexandrian ship at Puteoli. (...) Seneca records, not without Stoic complacency, how, while others were hurrying to the water-front, he basked in his own indolence, and although he had important business interests in Egypt, he made absolutely no haste to find out from his agents how his affairs were progressing. That Alexandrian ship which Seneca was watching might well have been the one on which Paul went to Italy, and from which he disembarked at Puteoli (Acts 28:11, 13). (...) both Seneca and Paul were apparently quite familiar with the concept of the *paedagogus*, who was such a well-known figure in the Roman world of their time. (...) One of the most striking proofs of this is the fact that a number of the same people played a role in both their lives, at least, as far as Paul is concerned, according to Acts. Claudius to whom, after his death Seneca devoted his work *De morte Claudii*, the *Divi Claudii Apocolocytosis*”⁷.

As we can see, there are some striking resemblances and historical hints concerning the tangents between their lives in particular.

However, there is nothing in Seneca's writings to indicate that he was somehow or in some way connected with the Christians. And Paul, as it is well established, is one of the most prominent messengers of Christianity. Therefore, it is rather odd that Seneca did not mention the Christians at all. Although, we can assume that he preferred to avoid a delicate subject like this. “Nevertheless some students of the subject believe they can demonstrate that he alludes to personal acquaintanceship with Christians. But this, too, is based on only the vaguest of information”⁸. Conceptually, we can't deny that there are common things in the Christian texts and in the Stoic doctrine – especially when we are referring to living in the most virtuous possible way, bearing in mind that in any vicissitude of fate there is a lesson which we should learn without complaining. Can we consider that it might have been an exchange between the two doctrines, not forgetting that the gospel texts have a philosophy of their own?

For this moment of our debate it is hard to find a compelling answer in either way – and it can be misleading if we do not erase many other unknowns and at least replace them with possibilities.

THE CONTENT OF THE LETTERS

An elegant manner to start this section is to provide a few clear answers on the topic. Thereby, “the bindings held at Vienna today consist of fourteen letters, eight

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 7–8.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

written by Seneca and six by Paul”⁹. Going further to another subject of interest, we can highlight the fact that “the correspondence is dated from that time forward (A.D. 61, author’s note) until A.D. 65, when both Paul and Seneca died under the hand of Nero”¹⁰. The last thesis is interesting due to the fact that their end occurred, again, in a similar way, brought about by the same imperial figure. This marks a peculiar aspect of their lives that seem to have had the same final trajectory, even though it is still unclear whether their paths crossed or not. Nonetheless, this is another of the many resemblances that gives rise to speculation in regards of their crossing fates.

Returning to Vienna and nowadays present, it is imperative to shed some light on a number of issues. First of all, some technical details about the letters.

“However, any reproduction of the manuscript pages, for the purpose of present-day book publishing, introduces certain visual problems in regard to optical clarity. (...) Nonetheless, the manuscripts at Vienna are entirely legible when viewed under proper lighting, although magnification is occasionally useful in cases of ink fading or damp staining. (...) Ultimately, the most laborious of all methods of reproduction was sorted to – a system of ink drafting known as the architectural facsimile. With this system, a number of high-resolution film images of the original sheaves were enlarged to the size of a standard architectural drawing”¹¹.

We are talking about extremely old bindings, whose capitalization in terms of reproduction requires a great deal of an effort and technology. So the effort of those who deciphered these writings and exposed them to the knowledge-seeking public is to be commended.

Secondly, it is necessary to point out an issue that is also in debate – their language, which is Latin, despite a preference for using Greek instead of Latin in that time period – sign of a distinction and erudition. Relevant or not, the Letters were written in Latin. “The fourteen letters make it clear that, from the ground line of the faith in Rome, the carrying vehicle of Christianity – was Latin and not Greek”¹². *Paul Berry* said that taking into consideration the fact that society was moving more and more towards an emphasis on the use of Latin in writing and beyond: in all sections of life, to blur the differences and to bring about a new higher statute of Latin, it was not strange at all that the letters were written in Latin. In other words, this was the beginning of a new epoch, in which Latin was the main lead in regards of a language *competition*.

“Seneca allows little doubt in the reader's mind regarding the transport vehicle of Paul’s words. « Wherefore, I urge you to grant me the sanction of using only the

⁹ P. Berry, *Correspondence between Paul and Seneca, A.D. 61–65*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies, Volume XII, The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 1999, p. II.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. IV.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. V.

very purest of *Latin phrasing*. With this gift, you will be able to frame your noble words in decorum, and to strengthen their execution in beauty »¹³ (author's highlight). Again, this goes along with the conclusions stated above.

However, despite all of these mentioned before,

“no Roman was in the slightest doubt as to the large Greek element in his city; some historians have estimated that half the population was composed of Greek slaves. Neither did Roman question the indebtedness of the Empire to the ancient Greek ideals in art, philosophy, drama, literature and architecture. Nearly all educated Romans had a Greek teacher”¹⁴.

In oppose to these, the same author continues with the other side's argument: “In the view of the ordinary citizen of the 1st century A.D., things Greek were the things of the slave population. Romans did not cherish the association”. Basically, the split between the Roman and Greek ideals was beginning to be felt, despite all the borrowings from Greek civilization and the friendliness with the Greek element, which represented one of the foundation stones of the Roman civilization.

In addition to those mentioned above, it is imperative to bring forth a few pertinent and interesting ideas written down by *J.N. Sevenster* in direct approach of the manuscripts:

“One of the fourteen letters is quite sufficient to display this correspondence in all its empty phraseology, its meaningless insignificance and insipid, exaggerated flattery. Indeed, with respect to this aspect of the correspondence there is virtually no difference of opinion, while the language, style and construction are also unanimously considered to be very clumsy”¹⁵.

In any case, expressions like “my dearly beloved Paul” or “such a great man as you” along with another amalgam of compliments and emptiness of content make us believe accordingly. Hereinafter, the author offered several examples of *devastating critics* of the letters' authenticity – Johannes Kreyher or Gaston Boissier among others. However, “(*Kreyher* – author's note) denies that this is the correspondence alluded to by Linus, Augustine and Jerome”¹⁶. According to this rather interesting idea, it seems that the original letters have lost their essence over time or even their content and maybe only the general ideas remained intact, but the full and objective content has been lost and remade after several centuries, starting from those simple vague ideas. Also, he could have referred to the fact that Linus, Jerome and Augustine had knowledge about other letters (that we do not possess in the present), and they are not those which came down to us. These are possibilities

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. XIV.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. V.

¹⁵ J.N. Sevenster, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

that derive from a premise as such. However, not even this speculation could be easily contested. Time puts its shadows upon many things from the past, therefore we are trying to figure out the truth from the tiniest pieces of information.

Going further with our analysis, *Paul Berry* said that “Paul’s mission was not to oppose the philosophy of the Stoics; at least on the naturalistic level, he had no reason to do so. Rather, his objective was to raise their vision to the transcendent level of a single omniscient God”¹⁷. Of course, the Apostle Paul did not intend in the first place to put himself against any of the morals and dogma deriving from Stoicism. Many things seemed to go in the same direction but afterwards they split into abstract concepts not far one from another. Paul was affirming a more personal God, whilst the Stoic philosophers were drawn to a naturalistic point of view, in which everything had a birth and an end and it was dominated by the laws of the universe and the universe was considered as a perpetual entirety.

Diving directly into the text of the letters, we find out that

“Paul’s first letter lends itself to two further assumptions, both more easily demonstrated: the season of his arrival in Rome would have been during the summer months, and the year of his arrival would have been in A.D. 61. The assumptions would seem to be sustainable from Paul’s account and from secular Roman history”¹⁸.

These pieces of information form a clear image about Paul’s arrival in Rome in regards of the temporal aspect. And as we mentioned before, this kind of knowledge is important for establishing the premises. Paul’s first letter does that.

“The omission of detail, so notable in Paul’s account of his stay in Puteoli, suggests that the year involved was A.D. 61 and not 62. The laconic style, the matter-of-fact attitude, the lack of description, the indifference to surroundings, the dry tone, all stand in sharp contrast to his elaborate sea narrative, the particulars of which he had dwelt on *in extenso* before the arrival at the Bay of Naples. In a word, the reader of Paul’s account has little reason to assume that any contemporaneous event in Puteoli had drawn his attention. On the other hand, if his landing had taken place the following year, such an assumption could not be easily sustained – given Paul’s descriptive powers. In A.D. 62, a vast earthquake shot across the Bay of Naples, its epicentre appeared to be located along the south shore. Seneca, from his townhouse in Puteoli, described the shockwave as it raced across the harbour”¹⁹.

Taking into account the possible year of his arriving, which derives from the reasoning and event analysis above, we can advance to the next relevant aspect.

¹⁷ P. Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

It is said that “Paul’s departure from Puteoli toward Rome was made along the Appian Way, an overland route of about 130 miles”²⁰. This distinction is not a less important one, as we get into the position of forming a puzzle from little information and presumptions. Thus, in this way we acknowledge the possible route of Paul towards his destination: Rome, in which he eventually arrived.

In the third letter, Seneca is the one who addresses Paul, drawing his attention in the end that he is not forgotten, but that he has been busy arranging many writings in one volume. Of course, one of the most important things to look for here is: what was the volume and which writings of Seneca are involved in the discussion?

“Speculation on the point, however, can be aided if the choices among Seneca’s writings should be limited to the letters which he wrote to his associate, Lucilius. Of these letters, 124 have survived. Most of them are of limited length, and permit individual topics to be detached from the whole. The subjects covered in the letters cover nearly the entire range of philosophical and theological subjects”²¹.

In other words, he has a probable answer to the question. Also, from this letter we acknowledge the fact that Seneca was indeed preoccupied with his writings and vast work. He was dedicating probably days in a row in order to have a well-established and defined work. Despite this, he did not forget to explain himself to Paul for his delay, so we can already presume that their connection was quite solid even from the moment of the third letter.

The fourth letter has a bizarre familiar yet distant tone that leads to several assumptions. For instance, it creates the impression that Paul and Seneca hadn’t met at the moment the fourth letter had been written. Paul addresses Seneca saying that they should see one another face to face, considering that he was constantly imagining Seneca “as if he was present with him”. Also,

“the 4th letter creates the impression that Paul was familiar with the *Letters* of Seneca, which had been in circulation at Rome long before the time of Paul’s arrival in the city. Paul’s salutation, in the opening line of the letter, is reminiscent of the first line in a typical Senecan greeting”²².

Paul having the knowledge of Seneca’s Letters is not an odd thing. They were, due to the popularity and fame of Seneca, quite renowned at that time. Thus, it is not hard at all to imagine him getting in contact with their content. However, in regards of them meeting face to face, the 4th letter raises another speculation in terms of their physical meeting and regarding the timeline of events that occurred between them: Paul was imagining Seneca near him as if never had they met in person. It is difficult

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

to tell whether he was longing to meet him again or he was portraying Seneca in his mind with no initial *tête-à-tête* discussion.

If we are to talk about Seneca's priorities concerning his writings' themes we should take into consideration the fact that "like many other Stoics, Seneca repeatedly expounds the destruction of the world by fire and floods, and its subsequent renewal, particularly in his *Naturales Quaestiones* which deals with a wide variety of natural phenomena. He is convinced that all human will come to an end"²³. Naturally, in this regard we can highlight the similarity with the Christian view, even though the cause differs: it is God, the Creator and the Renewal of the world (via destruction) or it is nature by itself. Still, the cycle which mankind seems to endure it is the same: birth, death and rebirth.

"The widening line of division in Rome was first noted in Seneca's letter no. 5 – the « indignation » of Poppaea. The line was more clearly drawn in Paul's letter no. 6 – the « offense » taken by some. Paul defined the division even more sharply with his phrase, « (...) we can overcome them ». But on the other side of the divide, his words had become a tower of strength for the believers in the palace (...). At a later time, Seneca's letter no. 7 would describe the nearly schizoid effect produced in Nero's court by the words of Paul"²⁴.

In light of the last idea, it has to be noted that around the time of Poppaea's indignation, things were visibly beginning to worsen in terms of religious values, principles and doctrine. It seemed that from that time forward, the tone of the Letters became more serious and grave.

Letter no. 7 opens with the statement made by Seneca to Paul, to whom he tells that he has read the letters to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Achaeans. As *Paul Berry* states in the cited work on page 60, there is no letter from Paul to Achaeans. Most likely the reference is to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, which opens with Paul's greeting – "(...) to the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are at Achaea". All of these inadvertences may be described as too much ease in their communication, as if they were not as familiar one to another as they wanted to be in the first place about important things that were going on in each of their particular situation. Many authors see this as a convincing factor in view of the non-authenticity of the Letters.

"In the 7th letter, Seneca – for the first time – openly drew attention to the style of Paul's language, « I wish, considering the grandeur of these things, that a fittingly majestic grammar should frame these expressions »"²⁵. This remark may seem rather pretentious at first glance, but we must bear in mind that Seneca was a man of special upbringing and erudition.

²³ J.N. Sevenster, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁴ P. Berry, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–56.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

Maintaining the already established tone stated a few lines before, in the 8th letter Paul addresses to Seneca, to whom he said that he should be more restrained regarding discussions with Nero (and the Empress) about religion and custom, stating that Nero was polytheist and would be offended by a monotheist belief. What is most interesting about this expression is that Paul seemed to exclude Seneca from the belief in numerous gods or from being close to a different other religion than Christianity.

“Paul was able to see the controlling element that was only partly clear to Seneca: any forward attempt to introduce the elements of Christianity before the throne could easily produce, as a result, a single repressive edict from the highest level of Empire, «I would ask that this not be done in the future», he wrote to Seneca. The element placed at risk, ultimately was the pyramidal structure of the Church. It had been painstakingly built, and Paul remembered the years of construction”²⁶.

Moreover, Paul possibly felt the rising tension and was more aware of its repercussions. He had already dealt with numerous tensions in the past, especially in the same context of religion and custom scission.

“Seneca virtually identifies God’s care with the working of the laws of nature, he can never take a decisive step in the direction of theism, but remains confined to pantheism”²⁷. Thus, we do not know for sure whether Seneca chose by heart to embrace the Christianity or not, despite his closeness with Paul’s beliefs. It was mostly the title and shape of their beliefs that were different. Keeping in mind their resemblances, Paul addresses to Seneca in order to warn him about the danger of fully exposing a totally different belief than the Emperor and Empress.

“Seneca’s letter no. 9 creates the impression of a direct reply to Paul’s previous mailing, and a narrow lapse of time in the exchange could be assumed. Seneca’s cautionary tone in the letter would seem to be a re-casting of his own approach regarding the presentation of Paul’s Epistles before Nero. The re-casting may also have exposed a more ominous side in the many attendants who gathered around the throne. On reflection, Seneca wrote, « (...) the minds of men are drawn away from all rightful arts and practices ». Such a theme had been touched on by Paul, and Seneca may have recalled various lines from the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, which he had read to Nero”²⁸.

To this end, Paul was beginning to look like a potential doctrinal and religious threat. And nothing is more dangerous for a cause than having the highest leaders of an Empire opposing against it and being in lack of a massive popular support.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

²⁷ J.N. Sevenster, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁸ P. Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

In the 10th letter,

“for the first time, the moral and theological realities are nowhere referred to. Instead, the purely humanistic element occupies the body of the letter. More exactly, the dominant personalities involved in Rome’s legal systems are the focus of Paul’s concern. The concern was real. The time of his trial was at hand, and his anxiety for the coming legal procedure weighed on him”²⁹.

In other words, his time was getting shorter. This is why his tone seemed to be preoccupied, but somehow resigned.

“Yet, Paul’s unfamiliarity with the legal infrastructure at Rome becomes evident in the 10th letter. He appears to think that Seneca was a member of the Roman Senate, when the office he actually held was that of Consul in A.D. 56. Paul mistakenly identifies Messala (*M. Valerius Messala*) as an acting Consul, when, in fact he had not held the office since A.D. 58. The acting Consuls for A.D. 64 (*Laecanius Bassus* and *Crassus Frugi*) were correctly named by Seneca in his subsequently reply (Letter no. 13)”³⁰.

Taking into consideration these new inadvertences, we have again, and this time, after another period of time spent exchanging letters, a lack of information in the person of Paul. Many ask themselves how could have they been so friendly and even caring one for another but however, making important errors while relating to the other one? An explanation could appear if we approached the re-writing timeline of the Letters, and here we only had speculations and presumptions. Maybe some information was lost during the passing of time and the person that re-wrote the Letters had to improvise in order to cover the missing parts. Thus, the errors fell in spite of Paul and Seneca, making them look like unprepared and off-hand persons while communicating.

Taking into account the translation of the 11th letter that can be found at page 94 in the cited book of *Paul Berry*, we definitely observe that Seneca addresses Paul in very high terms, “Paul, my beloved”, “I should wish that my position were yours, and that yours were mine” – the last idea leading to a single obvious conclusion: Seneca was aware that his role in the Roman Empire was threatened and that he was in danger of losing it, considering that at that time he was beginning to fall out of favour with Nero. The resignation was feeling in the air, Seneca envisioning his end and wanting to move away from the burden of his position and from hostilities. Both Seneca and Paul were condemned to follow the same end in the same approximate time. Until the last Letter, they kept the warm addressing and the intimate tone – that is considered, by many authors and historians, way too pretentious and unrealistically exaggerated.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

“The final two letters of the correspondence, paired together, cause the reader to consider the influence of Paul’s *Epistles*. Seneca’s remark, « you innocent people are caused to suffer » resembles the Pauline verse (Heb. 11-25), « suffer affliction with the people of God »³¹. The way Seneca portrayed the Christians was relevant for the historical truth. To this end, he indirectly described their oppression that we knew for sure it existed. His approach was also delicate, calling them “innocent”, as if he was perceiving their vulnerable purity and the intention not even to defend themselves.

“History offers no direct citation regarding the death of Paul. Nothing of his martyrdom can be stated with assurance, except that, as a Roman citizen, he would have been decapitated by a blade within the walls of the city. (...) Nero commanded the execution of Seneca, but the order was not quickly carried out. The public influence of the philosopher was no less than the influence of Paul”³².

In the sense of their death, they both welcomed it with dignity (a term that was often used by Seneca in his work). An execution can make you lose your head for your last minutes, but from the information that passed down to us (through Tacitus), Seneca seemed to have remained eloquent and endured everything with his inner power. His execution, by cutting his veins, a painful and bloody death faced with dignity and stoicism, absolves him of the mistakes of his life – as no one is perfect.

“In expressing their views on the after-life, both Paul and Seneca disclose the mysteries of their doctrine concerning God and man, and in so doing also reveal their soteriology”³³. Soteriology is at the basis of Christian doctrine, as it refers to salvation, its main objective. Both of them sought the virtue and highlighted its importance and its significant role in salvation, be it done for the sake of purifying the soul and absolve it from darkness and eternal pain or, in case of Seneca, for the sake of liberating the soul from the imprisonment of the body and eventually reuniting with nature/universe.

CONCLUSIONS

The authenticity of the correspondence between Paul and Seneca remains a mystery in terms of a paper-like exchange between the two – because the letters that passed down to us are dated centuries after the death of Paul and Seneca. But does this mean never they have met, nor they corresponded in some way? As it was presented above, there are many clues that provide at least the possibility of them having been in contact at a certain time.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 125–126.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 126–127.

³³ J.N. Sevenster, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

First of all, there are a lot of things in common in each of their lives' trajectories, starting from the fact that they lived in the approximately the same time and space. Moreover, both of them had a great ascension and then they ended up under the hand of Nero. Both of them supported the need to prioritise virtue as individuals and in society. They both believed that life should be lived beautifully, with dignity and love for others. There are many resemblances in light of their philosophical thinking, life and moral approaches.

Secondly, even if original letters had existed and were lost, this does not mean that at least some of the information that we have nowadays is not true. Maybe the letters were rewritten in grave conditions – with a loss of entire passages – and the person that dealt with their reproduction had to improvise. Moreover, maybe his or her research about the topic was not very profound or vast. In this case, it is easy to see why there are so many inadvertences and errors. Many of them are related to the lack of compelling content, but also to technical and historical mistakes. Also, the flattery and exaggerations were all over the place. These gave the letters a sense of forgery. Apart from these, there are, however, a few interesting ideas that seem to be legitimate. For instance, the references to the social situation in the Roman Empire, especially at the top hierarchy of the society. Furthermore, there is some sort of humanistic display of a moral stance that exchanges between Paul and Seneca. Several pieces of information seem genuine, others are devastatingly inaccurate and others are just plain and dull or simply wrong from a historical point of view.

There are not many things to relate to in the body of the letters as they are very short and much of their potential gets lost along the way by dealing too much with the glorification of the other or avoiding an in-depth discussion. Too much exposition and too little content.

However, should someone be blamed for giving life to the idea they were in good relations, if this was the case, even if they did it somehow clumsy? Probably not. If the idea was to send a message to the world in the favour of their connection, so be it. We know for sure either Paul or Seneca did not pass the frontiers of this world unnoticed. Their traces still outlines in the dust of history and time. We should analyse all of these matters with a humble heart and making way to all the possibilities; in this regard, we cannot, eventually, dismiss not even one narrow path of possible truth. In other words, a bond between the two is possible, thus sending letters from one to another is also a valid speculation. We agree, however, with the idea that at least most of their content is not authentic, if not all – but this doesn't exclude the existence (and afterwards loss) of other authentic letters.

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