

An Internal Chronology of the Pseudoclementines Tied to Secular History

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Although the dating of the Pseudoclementines is fraught with difficulty, there is abundant evidence to establish its internal intended chronology. This presentation will go through the Syriac text,¹ assembling all temporal references into a chronology and noting correlations to secular history, followed by a table and timeline to graphically represent the findings.

In Rec. Book 1, Clement claims to have first heard about Jesus in the Hebrew month of Nisan (approximately March through April) in the reign of Tiberius Caesar.² Clement later met Barnabas at Rome “in the summer of that year.”³ Tiberius died on March 16, 37 CE, establishing the following summer as the latest possible date for Clement’s meeting with Barnabas. Clement claims that he quickly left Rome to travel to Judea, allowing only a “few days” lapse between Barnabas’ voyage and his own.⁴ After “fifteen days” Clement arrives at Caesarea Straton in Judea, and after traveling “up into the land” he is introduced to Peter.⁵

The majority of Rec. 1 records Peter’s account of history, from the creation of the world until the events before Clement’s arrival. Peter explains how he was sent by Jesus’ brother James from Jericho to Caesarea on a “six day” journey, to publicly debate a schismatic Jesus-imposter

¹ The text used comes from the Syriac of BL Add. 12150 due to its intermediacy and greater originality, referencing both *Homilies* and *Recognitions* using the translation and abbreviations from my book: Gebhardt, J. (2014). *The Syriac Clementine Recognitions and Homilies: The First Complete Translation of the Text*. Nashville, TN: Grave Distractions Publications. [Out of Print]

² Rec. 1:5

³ Rec. 1:6

⁴ Rec. 1:12

⁵ Rec. 1:12

named Simon.⁶ Peter's narrative is related within "seven days" of Clement's arrival, during which time Simon had postponed the debate until "the eleventh of the month."⁷ Peter explains how James was still limping from a hostile encounter "thirty days" before he left Jericho.⁸ James was involved in public debates with priests and religious factions on the steps of the Jerusalem Temple, where he'd taught for "seven days" before being attacked by a person called only "an enemy."⁹ Peter explains how these debates took place during the Passover—notably after "one week of years was ended from Jesus' passion."¹⁰ The phrase, "one week of years was ended," is cognate to language to the Hebrew Bible's year of release, called the *shemittah* (שמיטה), the seventh year after six, wherein debts and contracts were cancelled to benefit public welfare.¹¹ Interestingly, this "week of years" language is also found in a prophetic apocryphon from the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹²

The text presents Caiaphas as the high priest: notable because it suggests a *terminus ad quem* correlating to secular history.¹³ According to Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, after Pilate's removal as procurator in 36 CE, Vitellius subsumed his position.¹⁴ Vitellius removed Caiaphas as high priest and, at one of three major festivals in the year 36 CE, replaced him with former high priest Jonathan ben Anan.¹⁵ This fixes 36 CE as the latest possible dating for the public debates at the Temple.

General scholarly consensus fixes the time of Jesus' execution somewhere between 30–33 CE. Since Caiaphas' last year as high priest was 36 CE, and since these events took place on

⁶ Rec. 1:72

⁷ Rec. 1:20

⁸ Rec. 1:71

⁹ Rec. 1:69–70

¹⁰ Rec. 1:43

¹¹ E.g. Deut. 15:1, Deut. 31:10, and Jer. 34:14

¹² 4Q390 2:3–4

¹³ Rec. 1:44

¹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii. 4, § 3

¹⁵ Ibid.

the seventh year after Jesus' execution, it seems that for the author(s), Jesus' execution would have occurred during Nisan in the year 30 CE, and the public debates at the Temple near Passover in 36 CE, coinciding most interestingly with Caiaphas' last year holding office. Approximate dates for the narrative and a timeline can thus be given, illustrating the only possible way to consistently assemble this chronology.

Rec. 2 begins on the first morning of Peter's debate with Simon,¹⁶ seven days after Clement's arrival in Caesarea. The actual debate begins later within Rec. 2, after nineteen chapters devoted to Peter's discussions with his friends.¹⁷ The debate continues until nightfall;¹⁸ followed by a short account of Peter's activities that evening.¹⁹ The second day's debate begins in Rec. 3:1, following a midnight discourse by Peter.²⁰

The second day's debate (taking up approximately one third of Rec. 3) continues until nightfall.²¹ The final day's debate is recounted in the second third of Rec. 3;²² this time Simon flees, but the time of day is unspecified. Peter tells the people to gather together the next morning.²³ Once again, Peter gives a midnight discourse to his followers.²⁴

The next morning a disciple of Simon comes begging for forgiveness, and Peter presents him to the assembling multitudes, thereafter giving a few speeches.²⁵ Peter states his intent to remain with them for three months "until the passover has drawn near."²⁶ Peter gives direction to his followers in Caesarea for three months, until the end of Passover, also sending spies to follow

¹⁶ Rec. 2:1

¹⁷ Rec. 2:19

¹⁸ Rec. 2:70

¹⁹ Rec. 2:70–72

²⁰ Rec. 3:2–11

²¹ Rec. 3:12–30

²² Rec. 3:31–48

²³ Rec. 3:50

²⁴ Rec. 3:51–62

²⁵ Rec. 3:63–68

²⁶ Rec. 3:67

Simon.²⁷ A letter arrives reporting Simon's deceptions in every city up the coast, and that he was currently in Tripolis spreading lies about Peter.²⁸ During this time Clement writes and sends ten documents to James, promising to follow up with records of Peter's activities as they pursue Simon.²⁹

The narrative continues with Peter and Clement traversing the coast from Caesarea to Tripolis, the first day arriving at Dora, and after a second, Ptolemaida, where they stay for ten days, promising to meet certain people at Tripolis, then proceeding northward through Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut toward Tripolis, where they planned to winter.³⁰ The first portion of the narrative, presented as "the first discourse of Clement" (corresponding to Rec. 1:1–4:1), ends here. The text resumes with another discourse on the third day in Tripolis,³¹ where Peter speaks about God's image and likeness in humans, and argues against idolatry.³² Peter then dismisses the multitudes, but since "there was still a great time" before evening, he discourses at his friends' request before retiring.³³

On the "fourth day" in Tripolis Peter gets up before daybreak, and after a crowd gathers, he discourses again about the image of God, idolatry, and other subjects.³⁴ Peter dismisses the multitude and retires for the day.³⁵ This course of action continues for "three months," and then Peter orders Clement to fast "certain days" before baptizing him "in fountains near the sea."³⁶ A "few days" later he exhorts the people to disregard any religious teachers who do not compare

²⁷ Rec. 3:70–74

²⁸ Rec. 3:73

²⁹ Rec. 3:74–75

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hom. 10:1

³² Hom. 10:2–25

³³ Hom. 10:26

³⁴ Hom. 11:1–33

³⁵ Hom. 11:34

³⁶ Hom. 11:34–35

their teachings with Jesus' brother James.³⁷ Peter sends some people ahead to Antioch, and then appoints a bishop and leaves Tripolis at the completion of "three months," traveling "on the road of Syrian Antioch."³⁸

"[O]n the same day" they reach Ortosias and stay "one day."³⁹ They next arrive at Antaradus and Peter splits up the group, sending Nicetas and Aquila ahead to Laodicea.⁴⁰ Peter then hears Clement's life story: at age five his mother left with his twin brothers;⁴¹ he and his father heard nothing of them for "three years;" in the fourth year when Clement was ten his father left to find them,⁴² but Clement hadn't heard anything for over "twenty years."⁴³ The timeline thus indicates Clement was about 30 years old.

Peter and Clement go from Antaradus to the island Aradus to see "two columns of vine" and some "works of Phidias."⁴⁴ Peter meets the old woman who is revealed as Clement's mother Matradora,⁴⁵ and reunites them.⁴⁶ Peter says he will stay in Antioch for "three months" and they leave the island for the mainland.⁴⁷ They pass the night and "on the next day" travel to Balaneas where they stay for "three days."⁴⁸ On the following day they reach Gabala and thereafter Laodicea, where they meet Nicetas and Aquila.⁴⁹ Peter suggests staying there for "ten days or more,"⁵⁰ and Nicetas and Aquila are recognized as Clement's brothers, Faustus and Faustinus.

³⁷ Hom. 11:35

³⁸ Hom. 11:36

³⁹ Hom. 12:1

⁴⁰ Hom. 12:2

⁴¹ Hom. 12:8

⁴² Hom. 12:10

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hom. 12:12

⁴⁵ Hom. 12:13–21

⁴⁶ Hom. 12:22–24

⁴⁷ Hom. 12:24

⁴⁸ Hom. 13:1

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Hom. 13:1

Matradora wants to be baptized that day, but Peter demands waiting until the morrow.⁵¹ That evening, Peter discourses on baptism and the value of chastity in marriage.⁵²

Matradora is baptized the following day “near the sea between steep rocks.”⁵³ They return to their lodging place, but Peter remains, only returning after “many hours.”⁵⁴ Peter narrates that he met an old man whom he discovered to be Clement’s father, Faustus, after disputing astrology.⁵⁵ The old man enters and the family is reunited.⁵⁶ Peter talks with Clement’s father into the evening, planning to meet Simon and someone called “Anubion” in Antioch, before going to sleep.⁵⁷ Here the Syriac text ends.

Though this ending may seem abrupt for literary narrative, it is important to note the Syriac text’s presentation as a series of letters, whose disjointed and missing portions have been filled in by later re-adaptations in the Greek *Homilies* and Latin *Recognitions*. Presumably later letters would have imparted further details of their aforementioned journey to Rome; however, it is here that the Syriac Pseudoclementines’ remarkable realism gives way to the fantastical legends of the Petrine Acts cycle.

This discussion shows that the Syriac Pseudoclementines only refer to a narrow timeframe: 36–37 CE. The following table highlights the above-mentioned data, and a timeline graphically relates the chronology to secular history. Notably, the material corresponding to Hom. 10–14 gives a context for Clement’s life and enables the inference that he was 30 years old during this time, thus being born around 6–7 CE.

⁵¹ Hom. 13:3–12

⁵² Hom. 13:13–21

⁵³ Hom. 14:1

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Hom. 14:2–8

⁵⁶ Hom. 14:9–12

⁵⁷ Hom. 14:12

TABLE OF CHRONOLOGY

6–7 CE	Clement is born at Rome.
11–12 CE	Clement's mother leaves Rome with his twin brothers.
16 CE	Clement's father leaves Rome and he hears nothing of him for twenty years.
30 CE	Jesus is crucified "one week of years" before the following events.
36 CE	At Passover there are week-long debates at the Temple in Jerusalem between the apostles, priests, and various factions of the people. At Rome Clement first hears news of Jesus in the month of Nisan (approximately March–April) in the reign of Tiberius. He then meets Barnabas at Rome in the summer of that year. In late summer Clement arrives at Caesarea and is appointed Peter's scribe. Peter debates against Simon, and after Simon flees, Peter stays three months instructing the congregation and installing Zacchaeus as bishop before traveling northward.
36–37 CE	Peter stays in Tripolis for three months of the winter and then travels north to Antaradus. Clement is reunited with his mother on the isle of Aradus, and then with his brothers and father in Laodicea.

TIMELINE

