Fragment of the Letter of Clement to Theodore Containing the Secret Gospel of Mark

A Study Edition

A. K. M. Adam

Translation and notes by A. K. M. Adam.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Text is numbered by page and line, as has become conventional for this text, but for the sake of convenience and smooth reading, line numbers have been relocated to the beginning of any word that is interrupted by a line break.

Greek text is set in SBL BibLit
English in Scala 12/16
Title set in Jupiter Pro

Edition 1.0, April 2018
Oxford: Quadriga, 2018
The following short treatment of the Letter of Clement to Theodore/Secret Gospel of Mark was prepared at first as a reference for myself, a Loeb-like comparison of Morton Smith’s transcription with his English translation, as I pondered the intricate questions that dog the question of authenticity and forgery. Then I translated it for myself, without relying on Smith; then I noticed that his was no longer the only transcription available, and it occurred to me that it might be handy to have this text available to distribute to students working on New Testament apocrypha. That required a vocabulary of Clement’s usage for such students as have only New Testament reading fluency.

I am not a palaeographer, so my scrutiny of the photographs of MS. Smith 65 has given me as many headaches as insights; yet as this is an utterly unambitious endeavour, I have felt it reasonable to trust the transcriptions of better readers of 18th-century Byzantine script than I (checking against the original, and then usually coming away satisfied that Smith has transcribed it correctly — which would only be expected, if it turns out that he wrote it himself).

My thanks to Andrew Guffey, Melanie Marshall, and Mark Edwards for helpful comments on a previous draft of this version.

I was excited by Morton Smith’s discovery when I first learned of it. After a while, though, it seemed a little too convenient a find, and when Stephen Carlson began framing his argument in favour of Smith’s having forged the letter, many of his observations rang true. As I keep returning to the text, though, the arguments against Smith having produced this text strike me as plausible as well. I am no longer confident that Smith himself forged the manuscript, and am more open to the possibility that the work is either an earlier forgery, or a genuine lost letter of Clement. Barring the unveiling of some decisive proof, I expect to be hesitant about authenticity for a long time. With a convenient copy of the text in Greek, however, and a viable translation, and some notes on the manuscript and vocabulary, other readers of Clement to Theodore/Secret Mark will be better equipped to make up their own minds.

A K M Adam
St Stephen’s House, Oxford
Easter, 2018
Ἐκ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου Κλήµεντος τοῦ Στρωµατέως Θεοδώρῳ.

2 Καλῶς ἐποίησας ἐπιστοµίας τὰς ἀφρήτους διδασκαλίας τῶν Καρποκρατιανῶν. Ὑπάτων γὰρ οἱ προφητευθέντες ἀστέρες πλανήται, οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς στενῆς τῶν ἐντολῶν ὁδὸς εἰς ἀπέρατον ἀβυσσὸν πλανῶµενοι τῶν σαρκικῶν καὶ ἔνσωµάτων ἀµαρτίων. Πεφυσιώµενοι γὰρ εἰς γνῶσιν, ὡς λέγουσιν, τῶν βαθέων τοῦ Σατανᾶ λανθάνουσιν εἰς τὸν ζόφον τοῦ ψεύδους ἑαυτοὺς ἀποῤῥίπτοντες καὶ καυχώµενοι ἐλευθέρους εἶναι. Τούτων οὖν αντιστατέον πάντῃ τε καὶ πάνω.

3 Οὗτοι γὰρ οἱ προφητευθέντες ἀστέρες πλανῆται, οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς στενῆς τῶν ἐντολῶν ὁδοῦ εἰς ἀπέρατον ἄβυσσον πλανώµενοι τῶν σαρκικῶν καὶ ἔνσωµάτων ἀµαρτίων. Πεφυσιώµενοι γὰρ εἰς γνῶσιν, ὡς λέγουσιν, τῶν βαθέων τοῦ Σατανᾶ λανθάνουσιν εἰς τὸν ζόφον τοῦ ψεύδους ἑαυτοὺς ἀποῤῥίπτοντες καὶ καυχώµενοι ἐλευθέρους εἶναι. Τούτων οὖν αντιστατέον πάντῃ τε καὶ πάνω.

4 Εἰ γὰρ καὶ τι ἀληθὲς λέγοιεν, οὐδὲν οὕτως συµφωνοῖ ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐραστής. Οὐδὲ γὰρ πάντα τἀληθῆ ἀλήθεια, οὐδὲν τὴν κατὰ τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας δόξας φαινοµένην ἀλήθειαν προκριτέον τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἀληθείας τῆς κατὰ τὴν πίστιν. Τῶν τοῖνυν βρυλοµένων περὶ τοῦ θεοπνεύστου κατὰ Μάρκου εὐαµελίου, τὰ μὲν ψεύδεται παντελῶς, τὰ δὲ, εἰ καὶ ἀληθῆ τινὰ περιεχεῖ, οὔτε ἀληθῶς παραδίδοται. Συγκεκραµένα γὰρ τάληθῃ τοῖς πλάσµασι παραχαράσσεται ὡστε, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ λεγόµενον, καὶ τὸ ἄλας μωρανθῆναι. Ο γοῦν Μάρκος, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Πέτρου ἐν Ρώμῃ διατριβὴν, ἀνέγραψε τὰς πράξεις τοῦ Κυρίου.

From the letters of the most holy Clement, of the Miscellany: to Theodore.

You did well, shutting up the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians. For these are the prophesied wandering stars, wandering from the narrow way of the commandments into a boundless abyss of the fleshly, bodily sins. For, puffed up with respect to knowledge, as they say, of the deep things of Satan, they neglect that they are throwing themselves away into the deepest darkness of falseness, and boasting that they are free, they have become slaves of servile desires. These, therefore, are to be resisted in every way and by all means. For, even if they might say something true, not even then should a lover of truth agree with them. For neither are all true things the truth, nor is what is apparently true according to human opinion preferable to the true truth, in accordance with the faith. So of the scuttlebutt concerning the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some things are entirely mistaken, and others, even if they do include some true things, still have not been handed on truly. For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savour. As for Mark, then, during Peter’s stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord’s doings. For the true — having been mixed with counterfeits — are debased, so that, as the saying goes, even salt goes stale. Mark did indeed write down the deeds of the Lord during Peter’s stay in Rome;
οὐ μέντοι πάσας ἐξαγγέλλων, οὐδὲ μὴν τὰς ἐκλεγόμενοι ἡχησιμωτάτας ἐνόμισε πρὸς αὐξήσιν τῆς τῶν κατηχομένων πίστεως. Τοῦ δὲ Πέτρου μαρτυρήσαντος παρῆλθεν εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ὁ Μάρκος κοιμίζων καὶ ταταυτῷ· καὶ τὰ τοῦ Πέτρου ὑπομνήματα, εξ ὧν μεταφέρον εἰς τὸ πρῶτον αὐτοῦ βιβλίον τὰ τοῖς προκόπτοντι περὶ τὴν γνῶσιν κατάληλα συνέταξε πνευματικῶτερον εὐαγγελίου εἰς τὴν τῶν τελειουμένως χρήσιν. Οὐδέπω ὅμως αὐτὰ τὰ ἀπόῤῥητα ἐξωρχήσατο, οὐδὲ κατέγραψε τὴν ἱεροφαντικὴν διδασκαλίαν τοῦ Κυρίου, ἀπὸ τὰς προγεγράμμεναις πράξεις ἐπιθεὶς καὶ ἀλας. Ἐτι προσεπήγαγε λόγια τινὰ ἐν πόσῳ τὴν ἐξήγησιν μυσταγωγήσειν τοὺς ἀκροατὰς εἰς τὸ ἄδυτον τῆς ἑπτάκις κεκαλυμμένης ἀληθείας. Οὕτως οὖν προπαρεσκεύασεν, οὐ φθονερῶς οὐδὲ ἀπροφυλάκτως, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶαι, καὶ ἀποθνήσκων κατέλιπε τὸ αὐτοῦ σύμφωνον τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τῇ ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ, ὅπου εἰσέτι νῦν ἀσφαλῶς ἄλα τηρεῖται.

not, however, recounting all, nor indeed intimating the mysterious, but choosing what he supposed most useful for the growth of the catechumens' faith. And when Peter was martyred, Mark escaped to Alexandria, taking along both his own and Peter's notes, from which he transferred the things suitable for progress toward knowledge into his first book; he arranged a more spiritual gospel for the use of the advanced. Likewise, never once did he betray the forbidden things, nor spell out the esoteric teaching of the Lord, but setting out the aforementioned deeds and others. Moreover, he added certain sayings whose interpretation he knew, to initiate the hearers into the sanctuary of the sevenfold hidden truth. So therefore, he prepared beforehand — not enviously or heedlessly, it seems to me — and when he died he left his treatise to the church in Alexandria, where still to this day it is kept completely secure, being read only to those who have been initiated into the great mysteries. And as the blood-stained demons are always plotting destruction to the human race, Carpocrates, taught by them and using deceptive skills, so enslaved some presbyter of the church in Alexandria that from him he acquired a copy of the mystical

a. ταταυτῷ [MS, PV] τα ταυτῷ [AT]
b. ἐπτάχις [AT] ἐπτάχις [PV]
c. καὶ [PV] καί [AT]
ἐν αὐτῷ, δὲ καὶ ἔχει γῆται κατὰ τὴν βλασφημῶν καὶ σαρκικὴν αὐτοῦ δόξαν. Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ ἐμὲ ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀχράντοις καὶ ἄγιαις λέξεων ἀναμιγνύς ἀναδεστατα ψεύσματα. Τοῦ δὲ κράματος τούτου ἔξαντείς τοῦ τῶν ἱεροπρατιανῶν δόγμα. Τούτων οὖν, καθὼς καὶ προείρηκα, οὔτεπετε εἰκέτειον, οὔτε προτείνουσιν αὐτοίς τὰ κατεψυχοῦσα συγγρηθέν τοῦ Μάρκου 12 ἐνία τὸ μπιστικὸν ἐναγγελίον, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲθ’ ὀρκου ἀρνητέον. Οὐ γὰρ ἀπασὶ 13 πάντα ἡλιγῆ λεκτέον. Διὰ τούτο ἡ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲ Σολομώντος 14 παραγιέλλει, ἀποκρίνοντο τῷ μωρῷ ἐκ τῆς μωρίας αὐτοῦ, πρὸς τοὺς τυφλοὺς τῶν 15 νόμον τὸ φῶς τῆς ἀληθείας δεῖν ἐπικρύπτεσθαι διδάσκουσα. Αὕτη 16 ἡμῖν, τοῦ δὲ μὴ ἔχοντος ἀρθῆσται, καὶ ὁ μωρός ἐν σκότει ποιεῖσθαι. Ἡμεῖς δὲ 17 δὲ υἱοί φωτός ἐσμεν, πεφωτισμένοι τῇ ἐξ ὑψος ἀνατολής τοῦ πνεύματος, ἔρχομεν ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον. Οὐ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Κυρίου, φησίν, ἔχει ἔλευθερία. Πάντα γὰρ 18 καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς. Σοι τοῖς όνων ὀνομάσθαι τῇ ἡρωτήματι 20 ἀποκρίνασθαι δι’ αὐτῶν τοῦ ἐναγγελίου λέξεων τὰ κατεψυχοῦσα ἐλέγχων.

21 Ἀμέλει ἐκεῖ τὸ ἄησαν δὲ ἐν τῇ ὀδῷ ἀναβαίνοντες εἰς Ἰεροσόλυμα, καὶ τὰ 22 ἐξῆς ἄς, μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται. 23 Ὡς ἔφη οὖν κατὰ λέξεις, 24 καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Βηθανίαν καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ μία γυνὴ ἣς ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτῆς ἀπέθανεν. Καὶ ἔλθον ἑλᾶνῳ προσκύνησε τὸν Ἰησούν καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ἡλί 25 Δαβίδ ἔλησον με.

Gospel, which he interpreted according to his blasphemous and fleshly notion. Even more, he defiled the uncontaminated and holy discourses by mixing in most shameless falsehoods. From this mixture is drawn the doctrine of the Carpocratians. To these, then, as I have said before, one must never yield, nor concede — when they allege slanders — that the mystical gospel is from Mark, but should even deny with an oath. For not to all should one say every true thing. Because of this, the wisdom of God through Solomon commands, ‘Answer the fool from his folly,’ teaching that it is necessary that the light of truth be concealed from blind minds. For example, it says ‘from the one who has not, it will be taken away’ and ‘Let the fool proceed in darkness.’ But we, we are sons of light, having been enlightened by the dawn from above of the spirit of the Lord. And where the spirit of the Lord is, it says, there is freedom. For to the pure, all things are pure. So I will not hold back from answering you what was asked, disproving the slanders through the same discourses of the gospel. Of course, after the ‘they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem’ and the next things, until ‘After three days he will rise again,’ here it adds, word for word, ‘and they came to Bethany and there was one woman there whose brother had died. And she came and worshipped Jesus and said to him, “Son of David, have mercy on me”.’
Oi de mabhthai epetimhshen aytē. Kai drugisbheis ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπῆλθεν met' aytē sē eis tôn khpōn ópou ἦν το μνημείου, καὶ εὐθὺς ἰκουσθῆ ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου φωνὴ μεγάλη, καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπέκυλσεν τὸν λίθον ἀπὸ τῆς βύρας τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ εἰσελθὼν εὐθὺς ὅπου ἦν ὁ νεανίσκος ἑξέτεινεν τὴν χεῖρα καὶ ἤγειρεν αὐτὸν κρατήσας τῆς χειρός, ὁ δὲ νεανίσκος ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἠκούσθη ἀπακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἵνα μετ' αὐτοῦ ἦν. Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἑξ' τοῦ μνημείου ἦλθον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ νεανίσκου, ἦν γὰρ πλοῦσιος. Καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας εὗ ἐπέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ ὁ ἡλίας γενομένης ἔρχεται ὁ νεανίσκος πρὸς αὐτὸν περιβεβλημένος σινδόνα ἐπὶ γυμνοῦ, καὶ ἐδοκίμασε σὺν αὐτῷ τὴν νύκτα ἑκείνην. Εἰς ἔδαφος γὰρ αὐτῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸ μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εξελθεὶς δὲ ἀναστὰς ἐπέστρεψεν ἐις τὸ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου. Ἡπὶ μὲν τούτου ἔπεται τὸ καὶ προσεπορεύοντο αὐτῷ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης καὶ πάσα ἡ περικοπή. Τὸ δὲ γυμνὸς γυμνοῦ καὶ τὰλλα περὶ ὅν ἐγραφαὶ οὐκ εὑρίσκεται. Μετὰ δὲ τὸ καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς Ιεριχώ ἐπάγει μόνον, καὶ ἦσαν ἐκεῖ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ νεανίσκου, ὅν ἠγάπα αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ Σαλώμη, καὶ οὐκ ἠπεδέξατο αὐτὰς ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τὰ πολλὰ ἐν τῆς ψεύσματα καὶ φαινέται καὶ ἕστιν. Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἀληθῆς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀληθῆς φιλοσοφίαν ἐξήγησις...

---

a. γυμνὸν [PV, MS] γυμνὸ [AT]
b. προσπορεύοντο [PV, MS] προσπορεύοντο [AT]
c. γυμνὸς [PV, MS] γυμνὸν [AT]

And the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, becoming angry, went away with her into the garden where the tomb was, and immediately a loud sound was heard from the tomb, and Jesus approached and rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb, and immediately entering where the youth was, he reached out his hand and raised him and grasped his hand, and the youth, seeing him, loved him and began to request of him that he might be with him. And coming out of the tomb, he went into the house of the youth, for he was wealthy. And after six days, Jesus commanded him, and when it was evening, the youth came to him wearing nothing but a robe. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. From there, he rose and returned to the other side of the Jordan. And though these follow the ‘and James and John came forward to him’ and the whole pericope, on the other hand the ‘naked to naked’ and the other things concerning which you wrote are not found. And after the ‘he came into Jericho’ it adds in only ‘and there were the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved, and his mother and Salome, and Jesus did not welcome them.’ But the many other things which you wrote both seem to be, and are, slanders. So, the true explanation, in accordance with true philosophy...

---

So the NRSV; more directly, ‘a robe over his nakedness’
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Vocabulary

Page I (sheet I, recto)

1. ἐπιστομίας, aor act ptc mas nom sg ἐπιστομώ, stop up, close up. AT transcribes as the aorist infinitive.

2. ἀπέρατος, fem acc sg ἀπέρατος, here probably limitless in the sense of I Tim 1:4 ‘endless genealogies,’ though I Tim uses the more usual spelling ἀπέρατος. ἀπέρατος might on the other hand bear the sense of not to be crossed, impassable.

3. ἐνσώµάτων, fem gen pl ἐνσώµατος, corporeal, incarnate

4. ἀνδραποδώδων, fem gen pl ἀνδραποδώδης, servile

5. προκριτέον, verbal adjective, one must check; it is necessary to arrest

6. θρυλέω, pres pass ptc neut gen pl θρυλεύω, LSJ gives the passive sense of to be common talk; BrDAG, to be repeated, be commonly said.

Some read this as foregrounding repetition, but the sense of various rumours spread abroad seems more to the point here: more everyone is talking about than everyone keeps repeating.

7. μυστικάς, neut acc pl μυστικάς, in technical usage having to do with the mysteries, or less technically mystic, mysterious

Page II (sheet I, verso)

1. μᾶλα εὖ intensifier for adjectives and adverbs; extremely, completely

2. μεταφέρων, pres act ptc mas nom sg μεταφέρω, most usually transfer, transport or change, transform; here the sense is clearly to take from [notes] and write into a narrative, for which the attested sense of translate (not necessarily from one language to another, but from one setting to another) seems more to the point than transfer, but would also likely ask too much of casual readers

3. κατάλληλα, neut acc pl κατάλλελος, ordinarily corresponding, parallel, but here in the secondary sense of appropriate, suitable; substantive use of the adjective

4. ἀπόρρητος, neut acc pl ἀπόρρητος (ἀπόρρητος), forbidden, prohibited; unmentionable, unspeakable; from ἀπό and ῥήτος (ῥῆς)

5. διατριβή, aor mid ind 3rd sg διατρίβω, let out, betray, divulge, hierophantic fem acc sg σαραφάντικός, hierophant - which won't convey much to ordinary readers, so esoteric

6. ἄντιστατον, verbal adjective, one must check; it is necessary to arrest

10. προσεπάγω, fem acc sg προσεπάγος, to be preferred

11. προπαρασκεύασεν, pres pass ind 3rd sg προπαρασκέω, to re-stamp a coin to change its value, whether to give the false impression that it is worth more, or to deflate its value; hence, debase

13. γούν from γε + οὖν, at least then, or for instance, or at all events, or yes indeed

14. πλάσματι, neut dat pl πλάσμα, in general something made or formed; in a neutral sense, something dreamed up, an invention or fantasy; in a hostile sense, as here, a counterfeit, a fake.

15. ἀπόγραφον, fem acc sg ἀπόγραφος, of a duration of time: wearing away, or positively as an amusing pastime, or negatively as a waste of time. Here apparently neutral, so simply an interval of time

16. ύποσηµαίνω, pres act ptc mas nom sg ύποσηµαίνω, give secret signs, express obliquely

17. μυστικάς, neut acc pl μυστικάς, in technical usage having to do with the mysteries, or less technically mystic, mysterious
transcribed, copied; thus, a copy

8 ἐμιᾶνε aor act ind 3rd sg μιᾶνω, stain, taint, defile
άχράντοις mas dat pl ἀχράντος, uncontaminated, undefiled
λέξειν fem dat pl of λέξις, speech, phrase, style; here, since the context seems to point to Jesus’s sayings in general, discourses

9 ἀναμεγνύσ pres act ptc mas nom sg ἀναμεγνύσ, mix together, mix up
ἀναιδέστατα superlative degree, neut acc pl ἀναιδής, shameless, so most shameless
κράτατος neut gen sg of κράτα, mixture
ἐξαντλῆται pres pass ind 3rd sg of ἐξαντλέω, is drawn off

10 ἐκτέον neut ἐκτός, impersonal, one must yield
προτείνουσιν pres act ptc mas dat pl προτείνω, stretch forward, extend, allege

11 κατεψευσμένα pf mid ptc neut acc pl καταψεύδομαι, to lie about, allege falsely, slander
συγχωρητέον, neut συγχωρητέος, impersonal, one must concede

12 μυστικὸν See I, 17
ἀρνητέον neut ἀρνητέος, impersonal, one must deny

15 ἐπικρύπτεσθαι pres pas inf ἐπικρύπτω, cover up, conceal
αὐτίκα adv, at once, now, immediately; for example

20 λέξεων See II, 8
κατεψευσμένα See II, 11

22 ἐπιφέρει pres act ind 3rd sg ἐπιφέρω, in the NT twice carrying the sense of inflict, but here in the neutral sense of offer, give, bring in addition. The implied subject is ‘the mystical gospel.’

Page III (sheet II)

11 ἐπεται pres mid ind 3rd sg ἐπομαι, follow

14 ἐπάγει pres act ind 3rd sg ἐπάγω, bring to, lead to; introduce, add to. The implied subject is again ‘the mystical gospel.’