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Forgery, fiction and pseudonym in the collection of medical letters prefacing Marcellus's *De medicamentis*

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In this article the corpus of eight letters serving as a preface to the pharmaceutical recipe collection which constitutes Marcellus's *De medicamentis* is examined from a literary point of view. The classification of the various letters in the epistolographic genre is discussed; the identities of the writers and the addressees are investigated, and in cases where the names are fictitious or incorrect, an attempt is made to determine the reason. Finally, the question is posed: why do all these apparently unrelated letters form part of this collection?

Vervalsing, fiksie en die gebruik van skuilname in die versameling mediese briewe wat as inleiding dien tot Marcellus se *De medicamentis*

In hierdie artikel word die corpus van agt briewe wat as inleiding dien tot die farmaseutiese resepversameling wat Marcellus se *De medicamentis* uitmaak, vanuit 'n literêre perspektief bekyk. Die klassifikasie van die onderskeie briewe in die epistolografiese genre word bespreek. Die identiteit van die skrywers en die ontvangers word nagegaan en in die gevalle waar die name fiktief of foutief is, word daar gepoog om die rede daarvoor vas te stel. Ten slotte word die vraag waarom hierdie skynbaar onverwante briewe deel uitmaak van hierdie versameling, bespreek.

In the early fifth century AD a certain Marcellus of Burdigala in southern Gaul (Bordeaux in France) settled down in his home town after an active public life, and collected some 2 500 pharmaceutical recipes in a book, the *De medicamentis*, which he dedicated to his sons.¹ Marcellus took great pains to make his book as instructive and interesting as possible: not only did he include in the introduction a number of didactic letters attributed to great medical authorities of the past as well as his own dedicatory letter; he also appended as an epilogue a sprightly poem enumerating the flora and fauna and minerals which constituted the ingredients of the recipes in his book.

Didactic medical letters are found in Greek and Latin literature from the earliest times, but until the fifth century AD they occurred independently, not in deliberate collections,² and formed only a small part of the Greek and Latin medical literature. In later centuries, however, the epistolary form became popular, particularly as a preface to a longer work or as a short treatise in itself (Langslow 2000: 74-5), and in the Middle Ages collections of medical letters assembled in one manuscript by copyists became quite common. Marcellus's collection is quite different: not only is it much earlier than the medieval collections, but it was made by one person and includes only one letter by its collator.³

The letters to be discussed are the following:⁴

- Marcellus to his sons;
- Largius Designatianus to his sons;
- Hippocrates of Cos to King Antiochus;
- Hippocrates of Cos to Maecenas;

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2 In Greek literature there is a corpus of 24 pseudepigrapha supposedly written by Hippocrates, to Hippocrates or about Hippocrates, compiled in the Roman era between the first century BC and the first century AD; this was, however, not a deliberate collection but a compilation of letters on a specific topic (Jouanna 1999: 7-8 & 396-8).

3 In Latin literature there are several well-known letter collections, for instance those of Seneca and Pliny the Younger, but in each case all the letters in the collection are by the author himself.

4 The text used is Niedermann & Liechtenhan (1968: 2-53).

- Plinius Secundus to his friends;
- Cornelius Celsus to C Iulius Callistus;
- Cornelius Celsus to Pullius Natalis;
- Vindicianus to the emperor Valentinianus.

In contrast to previous research discussing the transmission or the content of particular letters, this article will consider them from a literary perspective. Aspects which will be investigated include the following:

- the objective of the various letters, their classification in the epistolary genre, and the reason why the letter form was chosen to preface a pharmaceutical recipe collection;
- the identity of the various writers and addressees, and in cases where pseudonyms were used or an incorrect name given, an attempt to determine the reason, and
- the question as to why these apparently unrelated letters form part of the collection.⁵

1. The compiler: Marcellus

Very little is known about Marcellus. He was also dubbed Empiricus⁶ or Burdigalensis,⁷ but both names are late coinages (Kind 1930: 1498; Schanz *et al* 1959: 280). From 394 to late 395 he held the important post of *Magister Officiorum* (Master of the Offices)⁸ in the court of the

5 Wiedemann (1976: 43) is of the opinion that the letters cannot be reduced to an “einer gemeinsamen Nenner”.

6 According to Langslow (2000: 66 n27) he was called “Empiricus” because of his statement in § 1 of his own letter that he compiled his work *de empiricis* (with knowledge gained “by experience”).

7 Referring to his provenance. That Marcellus came from Gaul is proved by his reference in his introductory letter to his compatriots (*cives ... nostri*) Ausonius, Sibirius and Eutropius, all of whom had connections with Gaul. Matthews (1971: 1084-50) suggests that Marcellus came from southern Gaul, perhaps Narbonne.

8 The *Magister Officiorum* was in charge of the *magistri* in the secretarial departments *memoriae* (giving legal advice to the emperor), *epistularum* (correspondence), and *libellorum* (legal matters), and also regulated audiences with the emperor (Jones 1973: 367-8).

Roman emperor, Theodosius I.⁹ The various grades of senators had in the course of the fourth century begun to be distinguished by special honorary titles, and by virtue of this office Marcellus was called *Vir Illustris* (Jones 1973: 378). In 395 he was replaced as *Magister Officiorum*, an incident which could have been connected with the fall of his very influential patron, the Praetorian Prefect Fl Rufinus (Matthews 1971: 1078). Thereafter Marcellus seems to have returned from Constantinople to his home in the West where he presumably devoted himself to the compilation of his book of medical recipes, which was completed in the early fifth century AD.¹⁰ He did not regard himself as a professional in medical matters, however, but as an educated layman.¹¹

Roman aristocrats in Gaul lived in a very unsettled world in the fifth century due to the influx of an ever-increasing number of barbarians. Those who could not identify and merge with the barbarians relocated to more secure parts of the Roman Empire or sought careers in the church. Others turned inward and concentrated on the pursuit of literary excellence, which became the mark of a good Roman aristocrat.¹² A literary culture now bound Gallo-Roman aristocrats together, and literary circles at which the works of local and distant *litterateurs*, ancient and contemporary, were discussed, copied and circulated, came into being in every Gallic city of note, including Bordeaux and Narbonne (Mathisen 1993: 111; Chadwick 1955: 170-86). After his fall from grace Marcellus would have been one of those who benefited from the new criteria for aristocratic status, and would certainly have participated in such discussion groups. It is, in fact, quite possible that his idea of a collection of letters could have emanated from such literary gatherings

9 *Codex Iustinianus* 12.22.4 and *Codex Theodosianus* 16.5.29 and 6.29.8.

10 In the heading of his introductory letter he refers to himself as the *Magister Officiorum Theodosii Senioris*, but although Theodosius I died in 395, it was only from 408, after the accession of his grandson and namesake, that Theodosius I was referred to as "Senior".

11 Cf his letter (§ 2) as well as Schanz *et al* (1959: 280) and Langslow (2000: 66).

12 Cf the remark made in a letter by the blue-blooded Roman aristocrat of Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris: "Because the imperial ranks and offices have been swept away, through which it was possible to distinguish each best man from the worst, from now on to know literature will be the only indication of nobility" (*Ep* 8.2.2). Cf also Mathisen (1993: x and xii).

— letter-writing and making collections of letters for publication seem to have been very much in vogue in the closing years of the fourth century and throughout the fifth (Chadwick 1955: 7). Roman roads were still in good shape, and the great west-east road from Bordeaux to Constantinople greatly facilitated communication; books could also easily be sent from one end of the Empire to the other — St Jerome in Bethlehem, for instance, regularly borrowed books from friends in Europe (Chadwick 1955: 14-6). This fashion of letter-writing and the borrowing, sharing and copying of texts could perhaps explain the varied selection of letters in Marcellus's collection, originating at different times and in different parts of the Empire.

2. The objective, content and classification of the letters

Taking into account that Marcellus could have been influenced by the vogue for letter-writing, the question still arises as to why the introduction to a collection of medical recipes was written in the form of a letter, or rather letters. Why was a simple prose introduction not considered suitable? The letter form has from the earliest times been used to convey information in a text that was not a real letter to which an answer would be expected. Initially this was an informal kind of communication, but eventually it also developed its own stylistic conventions. Various kinds or "sub-genres" are distinguished,¹³ of which only the dedicatory letter, the didactic letter and the scientific letter will be referred to in this study.

There are many examples of the dedicatory letter in Latin literature, for instance the letter of Pliny the Elder dedicating his *Naturalis Historia* to the emperor Titus, and that of Pliny the Younger in his collection of his own letters dedicated to the Praetorian Prefect Septicius Clarus.¹⁴ The first letter of the Marcellus collection is that of the com-

13 Extensively discussed by Peter (1901), Schneider (1950: 564-85) and Sykutris (1931: 185-220).

14 Janson (1964: 107) pointed out that the epistolary preface became very popular in the late first century AD, and was even used as an introduction to collections of poems, eg Martial's *Epigrams* Bk II (dedicated to Decianus), Bk VIII (to the emperor Domitianus), and Bk XII (to Priscus). Somewhat earlier there were

piler, dedicating his *De medicamentis* to his sons,¹⁵ although it is clear that he wished the work to be more widely disseminated (§ 4). It is an extended dedicatory letter, expatiating on the reason for the compilation of the recipes, the sources, and precautions regarding the preparation and use of the medicaments. He also gives a reason for adding the other letters, namely his wish that apart from providing valuable information on protecting one's health, they may also prompt his sons to acquire the necessary knowledge of medicine themselves (§ 6). The letter also contains some commonplaces often occurring in literary prefaces (Janson 1964: 113ff), for instance the mention of famous predecessors, here intended to emphasise the author's diligence¹⁶ and to give his work an air of authority. Another oft-recurring theme is the profitableness of the information supplied — the usefulness of the recipes in enabling the addressees to cure themselves without the intervention of a doctor is emphasised (§ 3).

The letter of Largius Designatianus to his sons is also a dedicatory letter, as is the second Celsus letter (to Pullius Natalis) — both are introductions to translations of Greek works, purported to have been made by the authors of the letters (in the latter case the translated work is lost). The (unstated) reason for the Latin translations is the dwindling knowledge of Greek in the later Roman Empire. In the letters the authors explain their *modus operandi* to the dedicatees (free translation and literal translation, respectively) without giving any medical advice. The Celsus letter purports to be an answer to a request from the dedicatee (§ 1), a commonplace in epistolography, making the dedication a logical consequence.¹⁷ In this letter the author's diligence (§ 2) and the usefulness of the recipes (§ 2) are again mentioned.

Vitruvius's *De Architectura*, with its introductory letter dedicating it to the emperor Augustus, and Seneca the Elder's *Controversia*, dedicated to his sons Novatus, Seneca and Mela. Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* is also prefaced by a letter dedicating it to Septicius Clarus.

- 15 It was a popular practice among writers of textbooks in antiquity to dedicate them to their sons, eg Cato the Elder, Cicero and Seneca the Elder. Cf Janson (1964: 117 n.3) for further references.
- 16 "I examined carefully" (§ 2). Cf too § 3: "that provision be made by my hard work and watchfulness".
- 17 A previous request is often given as reason for writing a work, eg Cicero's *De Oratore* 1.4-6 and Varro's *De re rustica* 1.2. Cf Römer (1987: 130) for further references.

Another category is the didactic letter (*Lehrbrief*). The prime example in Greek literature would be the moralistic letters of the philosopher Epicurus to his students in the diaspora about the right way of life (Sykutris 1931: 203). These were intended from the start for a wider readership. In Roman times Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* is a fitting example, as are St Paul's epistles to the various congregations (though of course written in Greek); in later times there are the didactic letters of practically all the Church Fathers. Many pseudepigrapha also fall in this sub-genre, for instance the spurious letters of Socrates, Alexander the Great, Cleopatra, and the correspondence between St Paul and the Roman philosopher Seneca.

In the Marcellus collection two of the introductory letters are combinations of dedicatory and didactic letters. The first, ascribed to Celsus (the one to Callistus), was in fact written by Scribonius Largus as we shall see; it was the earliest medical letter in Latin literature, and served as an introduction to one of the first medical recipe books. The *Compositiones* was dedicated to the influential freedman, C Iulius Callistus, who presented the work to the emperor Claudius (41-54 BC). The letter has two main themes: it advocates the use of (mild) drugs to cure the sick (obviously a justification for the collection of recipes), and it attempts to provide some kind of ethical framework for doctors (based on the Hippocratic Oath) at a time when there was no form of licensing to lay down requirements for practising as a doctor. It is thus a *Lehrbrief* in the original Epicurean or Senecan sense of the word. This letter is a typical "preface" and contains the following commonplaces:

- it starts with a quotation from the famous Alexandrian physician of the third century BC, Herophilus;¹⁸
- it mentions the author's diligence in collecting the recipes (§ 11 and 13);
- it stresses the usefulness of his endeavour (§ 11 and 12);

18 "Medicaments are the hands of the immortal gods", § 1. Janson (1964: 156) points out that it became common practice, especially among the late Latin Christian authors, to start a sermon with words taken from some respected predecessor, in order to lend some credibility to what would follow. An alternative explanation is that writers lacking in confidence would resort to a ready-made formula for the difficult process of beginning a work.

- Callistus's request for the work makes the dedication a logical consequence (§ 12);
- Callistus is asked to read the work and give his view (§ 13);¹⁹ this letter extends the transference of responsibility to the "publication" of the book, as it were, when it is handed over to the emperor (§ 13) — the intention being to emphasise the author's modesty.
- There is also a commonplace apology for the quality of the work (Janson 1964: 98-100), in which the (mock) modesty of the author is evident from his explaining the small number of recipes in the collection (a mere 271!) as due to the fact that he is abroad and does not have all his books with him (§ 4).

The letter of Vindicianus to the emperor Valentinian (364-375) also served as the introduction to a (lost)²⁰ collection of recipes. Vindicianus was a distinguished North African physician of the fourth century AD, Proconsul of Africa in 380 or 381, and Count of the newly created elite Roman College of Physicians. In the letter two case histories are discussed — one of a patient with severe constipation, and the other of a patient suffering from a continuous flux of tears. Vindicianus describes the symptoms, gives a prognosis of the constipated patient, and relates the therapy he recommended and the (positive) outcome in the case (§ 2-7). The ophthalmological patient was a lost cause which he used to denounce the therapies of his fellow-doctors (§ 8-10), ending with a warning to the emperor not to put his trust in any and every kind of treatment (§ 10). It is thus a *Lebrbrief* in a very general sense (Vindicianus would certainly have wanted us to view it as such!) and is clearly also intended for a larger reading public than just the emperor (§ 10). This letter is a rather unusual epistolary preface. The heading²¹ suggests that it is a dedicatory letter, a view which is confirmed by the fact that the emperor is addressed on various occasions. However, it contains none of the traditional commonplaces (diligence, usefulness, responding to

19 According to Janson (1964: 141-3) this kind of request became standard practice in the second and third centuries.

20 Of the one or two books of recipes, only four recipes were transmitted, of which one may be found in Marcellus (*Med* 16.100) and three in Cassius Felix (*Phys* 32, 42 and 69).

21 "A letter of Vindicianus, Count of the Doctors, to the emperor Valentinian".

a request, etc). And far from being modest and self-deprecatory — the typical traits of late Latin epistolary prefaces — this letter is a self-recommendation in which Vindicianus explains his therapy, parades his knowledge and criticises his fellow-doctors. The only genuflection to tradition is his use of the ship metaphor in the first paragraph, which he transforms from the usual expression of anxiety in the face of a daunting endeavour (as many earlier authors had done),²² to one comparing a human being's state of health — subject to many unpredictable incidents — with the vicissitudes of an inexperienced helmsman steering his boat on an unpredictable sea.

Closely related to the didactic letter is the sub-genre which Sykutris (1931: 204-5) calls "Wissenschaftliche Literatur in Briefform". One of the first authors to use this kind of letter to convey scientific information was Archimedes, who in his enthusiasm to convey the results of his experiments to his friends, found the letter the quickest way. It was later found to be a convenient and unpretentious medium for answering scientific questions from friends or colleagues and for discussing problematic topics at too short a length to fill a book (the same format we use today in publishing articles). It was a popular way of transmitting information, and all disciplines, including medicine, are represented;²³ it was also popular for publishing pseudepigrapha (Zurli 1990: 388).

The letter ascribed to Plinius Secundus, although being the introduction to a collection of more than 1 100 recipes and dedicated in a general fashion to "his friends", is such a mini-treatise. It therefore lacks the usual commonplaces occurring in epistolary prefaces. It contains some medical advice to laymen on how to counter the fraudulence and avarice of doctors by suggesting replacements for ingredients which might not easily be found when travelling.

The two letters ascribed to Hippocrates also belong in this category. Although both purport to be written to real people and to be sincere attempts to give advice on a good lifestyle, they are in fact short medical treatises in their own right, couched in the form of letters. Their

22 St Jerome, *Epist* I.2; for further examples cf Janson 1964: 146-7.

23 In fact, many treatises were in the course of their transmission later called "letters" although they were not initially written as such, eg Vindicianus's *Gynaecia*, which is referred to in some of the manuscripts as an *epistula*.

middle sections are similar²⁴ in that both describe a fourfold division of the body in the traditional *a capite ad calcem* form (from head to heel): head, breast, abdomen and bladder. For each section of the body the symptoms of possible diseases are described, followed by a prophylactic treatment (mainly consisting of a *catharsis*), and then a description of the dire consequences of not following the suggested treatment. The Antiochus letter then adds as an epilogue a brief dietary calendar prescribing the right diet and lifestyle for the various seasons; the Maecenas letter, on the other hand, includes various bits of additional information:²⁵ short discussions of the four elements and the four humours (§ 2-3), as well as a paragraph on diagnosis based on the colour of urine (§ 5).²⁶ The introductory paragraph of the Maecenas letter which contains such commonplaces as purporting to be an answer to a request for advice on maintaining good health, mentioning the author's diligence, and being self-deprecatory in referring to his "little book" (*libellum*), shows a greater resemblance to the traditional epistolary preface than that of the Antiochus letter, which, however, does contain a laudatory dedication to the "great king".

3. Fiction, forgery and pseudonyms

Five of the eight letters in this collection have a fictional or faultily attributed author and/or addressee. Why the writers chose to use pseudonyms, why a particular name was substituted, and who the real authors were will now be discussed.

Fictional letters or pseudepigrapha formed a well-established sub-genre in both Greek and Roman times. The writing of spurious letters seems to have been assiduously practised in antiquity — in fact, very few illustrious personalities in ancient history were not credited with an extensive correspondence. Famous Greek pseudepigrapha include the letters of figures like Alexander the Great, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Demosthenes and Hippocrates. In Roman times the writing of fictional

24 § 2-7 of the Antiochus letter; § 4 and 6-10 of the Maecenas letter.

25 It is described as a "compendium" by Zurli (1990: 391).

26 The final paragraph of the Maecenas letter contains a reference to a (lost) book on the effects of herbs by Terentius Euelpistus, a famous surgeon during the reign of the emperor Tiberius (Wellmann 1907: 951), but this is probably a later addition.

letters formed part of compulsory stylistic exercises in schools of rhetoric: pupils were trained to write a letter on a specific topic, assuming the personality of some mythical or historical character (Grafton 1990: 11). This practice found its way into literature — one need only think of Ovid's *Heroides* (letters from mythological female figures to absent husbands or lovers).²⁷ In the late first century AD there was even an attempt by Pliny the Younger to publish a collection of rhetorically stylised letters under pseudonyms, and to have this kind of letter raised to the level of an independent literary genre (Peter 1965: 173).

Although copyright did not exist until relatively recently, people in antiquity were well aware of forgery as can be seen from various words used to describe such an action²⁸ as well as from incidents such as that described by Vitruvius: a literary contest was held in Alexandria, and to the surprise of the audience the judge awarded the prize to a contestant whose composition had certainly not been the best. When asked to defend his decision, the judge said that the work of the favourite contestant was a literal copy of the work of a well-known author. The unsuccessful competitor was then sentenced by a tribunal as a veritable thief, and ignominiously driven out of the city.²⁹ Forgery in Graeco-Roman times can thus be described as a calculated attempt to deceive for personal gain. However, there is a world of difference between faking for profit and innocently using a pseudonym.³⁰ Not all pseudepigrapha are thus to be regarded as forgeries in the modern sense of the word.³¹ In each case, the motivation of the author should be considered. Se-

27 Cf Peter (1965: 168-77) for more examples.

28 Κιβ̅ δηλευειν, νοθευειν, πλαττειν, *adulterare, confingere, falsare* etc. Reference in Metzger 1980: 11.

29 *De Arch* 7.4-7.

30 Syme (1983: 10) points out that forgery might not be the correct term: "The word exudes an odour of personal guilt and criminal handiwork" and suggests the term "imposture".

31 Writings that have in the course of their descent from antiquity been misattributed due to some fortuitous accident of copying are thus excluded from the category of literary forgery. For instance, when scribes copied a manuscript containing a miscellaneous assortment of writings, there was the chance that some or all of them could be attributed to the main author of the collection or the one who happened to be named at the beginning of the manuscript (Metzger 1980: 8).

veral reasons for writing such letters have been advanced (cf Schneider 1950: 574; Sykutris 1931: 211; Metzger 1980: 3-10; Syme 1983: 4-5):

- stylistic exercises, as indicated above, or
- to satisfy readers' curiosity about the lives and early writings of famous people (such as the Hippocratic letters mentioned in note 1), or
- to imitate popular authors, or
- to give some authority to the information to be transmitted, as when the actual author is a novice in the field, or
- for financial gain (when a lesser known author assumed the name of a famous person such as Hippocrates because the manuscript would sell better), or
- to lend credence to a controversial matter, or
- for the sadistic pleasure of seeing others fooled, or
- from pure malice, to compromise an individual or a government.³²

In the Marcellus collection the first letter (that of Marcellus to his sons) and the last (that of Vindicianus to the emperor Valentinian) are authentic, written by historical personages to historical addressees. The letter from Largius Designatianus to his sons, introducing the translation which he claims to have made of the Hippocrates letter to Antiochus, is probably authentic too, since Designatianus is also mentioned in Marcellus's introductory letter among the Latin medical authors of old which he used; however, we know nothing more about him (Kind 1924: 836). Neither do we know anything about Pullius Natalis, to whom the second Celsus letter is addressed. Nor is there any evidence that the well-known first-century medical writer of the *De medicina* translated two books of Greek medical recipes (now lost). The name "Celsus" is thus clearly a pseudonym assumed by the writer of the letter, probably to lend authority to his endeavour.

The two Hippocrates letters are forgeries. The manuscript tradition of these letters has not yet been studied in depth and it is therefore not possible to give concrete evidence about their origin and dating. However, with reference to the letter of Hippocrates to Antiochus we know

32 For instance the so-called *Acts of Pilate*, which are filled with calumnies against the moral and religious character of Jesus (Metzger 1980: 4).

for certain that among the medical excerpts of Paul of Aegina, a medical writer of the seventh century AD,³³ a Greek letter of Diocles of Carystus to King Antiochus was found. W Jaeger (1938: 17ff.) believed this letter to be authentic, written by Diocles himself between 306 and 301 BC, but that the addressee was the aged King Antigonos Monophthalmus. In opposition to this view, F Heinimann (1955: 158-72) has convincingly proved that neither the date nor the style nor the content of the letter supports the view that Diocles was the author. Instead, Heinimann believes it to be “eine volksmedizinische Lehrschrift in Briefform” which originated on the periphery of scientific medicine as a handbook or *vademecum* containing simple prophylactic treatments.³⁴ This view is supported by Fischer (200X: 608.3) who pointed out that the topic (promising protection against disease if the prophylactic measures are followed), the brevity and the obvious address to the laity are typical of the often-transmitted short medical treatises of the late Empire. If we accept this view, it means that this letter could have been written as late as the third or early fourth century AD. The desire for financial gain could have played a role in the attribution of the letter to Diocles (and later to Hippocrates) — giving it a false air of antiquity would have aroused the interest of great patrons who prided themselves on their libraries.

Whatever the origin or date of composition, when this letter surfaced again, it was in Latin translations, of which the version in the Marcellus collection has Hippocrates as the writer and King Antiochus as the addressee. Since Largius Designatianus states in his dedicatory letter that he had “recently read a letter of Hippocrates of Cos” which he translated into Latin, it is quite possible that he himself replaced Diocles's name with that of Hippocrates as being more well-known and giving some authority to the letter. The change of the addressee's name from Antigonos to Antiochus (if we accept Jaeger's view referred to above) can be explained by the fact that both were well-known rulers in the late fourth/early third century BC whose names would have correlated with the presumed era of Diocles (although not with that of Hippocrates, who lived a century earlier).

33 Bk I.100, in CMG IX.1.68.25 ff.

34 Neither Galen nor Oreibasius, who read Diocles and translated large sections of his work, seems to have known the Antigonos letter.

The second Hippocrates letter, addressed to Maecenas, was shown to have derived from the same Diocles-Antigonus letter.³⁵ Opsomer & Halleux (1985: 339-64) argued that the different introductory paragraphs of the two Hippocrates letters probably initially prevented scholars from recognising their link to one original. The promises made in the first paragraphs are basically the same, but the formulation is quite different: the Antiochus letter starts with a humble address to a great king whose life should be prolonged by prophylactic measures for the benefit of his subjects and promises that the causes and symptoms of diseases and their respective therapies will be expounded; the Maecenas letter purports to be an answer to a request from the addressee for advice on how to protect his health, and promises to describe the treatments for diseases. The two letters do, however, reveal an essential resemblance, as has been indicated above.

To complicate matters even further, there are references to “Caesar” (the emperor Augustus) in the Maecenas letter, which — together with the fact that the addressee was a close friend of Augustus — lead one to believe that the letter was originally attributed to Antonius Musa, Augustus’s personal physician; in fact, in later literature Ps-Antonius Musa is given as the author (Fischer 200X: 608.3). He cured the emperor of a serious disease in 23 BC by a treatment consisting of cold water and lettuce³⁶ and was also the author of a book on pharmaceuticals (Wellmann 1894: 79). There is, however, no evidence that he was in fact the author of the *Epistula ad Maecenatem*; in fact, Heinimann (1955: 171) believes that the two translations/adaptations of the original Diocles letter were made by the same person. As in the case of the Hip-

- 35 There are in fact three different versions of the original Greek Diocles-Antigonus letter in Latin (Sabbah *et al* 1987: 96-7, Zurli 1990: 389): (i) a free translation by Largius Designatianus (more or less a paraphrase), which is the Hippocrates-Antiochus letter in the Marcellus collection; (ii) a literal translation found in a manuscript at Uppsala, as well as a later version thereof, retouched but still close to the original Greek version, and (iii) an original piece of writing, influenced by (i) and (ii), which gives us the Hippocrates-Maecenas letter in the Marcellus collection.
- 36 Dio Cassius 53.30. He was richly recompensed by Augustus. It was thanks to him that the hydropathic healing method came into vogue. However, the emperor’s nephew, Marcellus, became ill soon after and was treated by Antonius Musa in the same way, yet died.

pocrates/Antiochus letter, the name of the lesser-known Antonius Musa would have been replaced by that of Hippocrates in order to give the translation an air of authority and increase its monetary value. For some reason the name of the addressee, Maecenas, who lived some four centuries after Hippocrates, was allowed to remain (as was the case with the name of Antiochus in the other Hippocrates letter). However, Heinimann (1955: 172) observes that the fanciful way in which correspondents centuries apart were linked made it clear to the reader that these were pseudepigrapha, and that anachronisms were not thus regarded as problematic.³⁷ Although clearly a forgery, it is a moot point whether the letter initially attributed to Diocles and later to Hippocrates was a calculated attempt to deceive, or merely an attempt to provide some kind of guarantee of the value of the work (which would in the process make it a bargain).

The author of the letter ascribed to Plinius Secundus also used a pseudonym. This letter is the introduction to a collection of more than 1 100 recipes by an anonymous excerptor, and can be dated to c AD 300. The pseudonym bears some relation to the collection of recipes and was probably quite innocently chosen with this in mind (Fischer 200X: 608.3), since about five-sixths of the recipes in the *Medicina Plinii* collection were excerpted from the *Naturalis Historiae* by the encyclopaedist of the first century AD, C Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Elder) (Langslow 2000: 64).

The first Celsus letter (to Iulius Callistus) is authentic, and served as the introduction to the *Compositiones*, yet another collection of medical recipes. The name of the addressee is correct, but the name of the real writer, Scribonius Largus, has for some inexplicable reason been replaced by that of Cornelius Celsus,³⁸ the well-known writer of the *De*

37 Cf too the scabrous letters purporting to have been written by Cleopatra (first century BC) to the gynecologist Soranus (first/second century AD), complaining about the performance of her lover, Antonius, in bed.

38 Various explanations have been given, but none of them are satisfying. Sconocchia (mentioned by Fischer 200X: 608.3) suggests that in Marcellus's exemplar the work of Celsus preceded that of Scribonius Largus, and that (as often happened in manuscripts) the *Compositiones* followed without a break or an indication of the new title or author, with the result that Marcellus could have believed this still to be Celsus's work. Fischer (200X: 608.3) and Kind (1930: 1501) doubt

medicina (first century AD). Scribonius Largus, roughly contemporary with Celsus, seems to have been a freedman and a military doctor in the British campaign of the emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) (§ 67), and had connections in the court. This can be deduced from § 60, where he provides a recipe for a certain kind of toothpaste to whiten and strengthen the teeth, which he claims was used by the emperor's wife, Messalina.

4. Reasons for the inclusion of these specific letters in the collection

In his introductory letter Marcellus mentions that his sources include "the two Plinys" (which would refer to Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historiae* and Ps-Pliny's *Medicina Plinii*). It is thus obvious that the letter ascribed to Plinius Secundus was from the start an integral member of the group of letters — in fact, Fischer (200X: 608.3) believes that this letter was initially probably the first to be included in Marcellus's collection. It has also been indicated that Scribonius Largus and Vindicianus were among the sources which Marcellus used; their letters also served as introductions to other collections of recipes, which makes the rationale behind their inclusion in this collection self-evident. We have little knowledge of the second Ps-Celsus letter (to Pullius Natalis), but the fact that it purports to be an introduction to a translation of Greek medical recipes makes its inclusion quite understandable.

The two Ps-Hippocrates letters are, as we have seen, short scientific treatises couched in the form of letters, and deriving from the same original Greek letter. The possibility that both are re-worked translations of a single Greek original might explain why they happened to be grouped together in the Marcellus collection. Fischer (200X: 608.3) believes that they (together with Designatianus's introductory letter) could have been later additions to the collection, probably in the course of the

this, since there is no trace elsewhere of Celsus's works in Marcellus's book. Another suggestion was that Marcellus substituted the name of Scribonius for the latter's teacher, Apuleius Celsus (hence also the reference to him in the *Praefatio* § 2), a suggestion supported by Niedermann & Liechtenhan (1968: xviii-xix). However, the manuscript reading is "Apuleius et Celsus", an obstacle which some scholars have removed by bracketing the "et". The problem of the exchange of names thus remains insoluble.

fifth century. These two letters enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages as a *vademecum* of simple prophylactic medicines (Sabbah *et al* 1987: 97) and were also the only two letters to be transmitted independently of this collection.

5. Conclusion

The collection of didactic letters prefacing the *De medicamentis* is indeed unique. Marcellus wished to make his book as useful as possible by supplying some 2500 pharmaceutical recipes which would have covered most of the known ailments of his day, and as instructive as possible by adding seven letters on medical topics to his own dedicatory letter. It is the first collection of its kind in Latin medical literature, and also unique in the cadre of Latin letter collections in so far as its emphasis is on the contributions of other authors, rather than on that of the compiler himself.

From a psychological point of view, making letters by other writers part of his introduction was a very shrewd move on Marcellus's part in terms of his objective — not only to equip his sons (and the general public) with sufficient medical knowledge to minister to themselves, thereby avoiding having to consult a doctor, but also to inculcate in his sons a personal desire to acquire the necessary medical knowledge. So, instead of introducing the recipe collection with a long sermon by a parent (which was unlikely to be appreciated), he wisely included the advice of independent outsiders (likely to have been acknowledged by his contemporaries as authorities) whose views complemented and corroborated his own. Three, or possibly four of the letters are authentic; two are forgeries; two use pseudonyms to give an air of authority to their recipe collections, and in one case the reason for the substitution of the name cannot be determined, but all have the common purpose of disseminating medical information in one form or another.

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