Sprengel's Latin,[34] or Goodyer's English,[35] will note some striking reinterpretations. Some of these are based on the better Greek text of Wellmann; others result from our judgment of Dioscorides' meaning. What the *Materia Medica* lacks in elegance is more than compensated by its content, and the *Preface* stands as an important document in the history of pharmacy, providing a guide to the basic principles followed in the rest of the work.

34. C. Sprengel, ed., with Latin trans., *Pedanii Dioscoridis Anazarbei De materia medica* (Leipzig, 1829 [in C.G. Kühn, ed., *Medicorum Graecorum opera quae exstant*, Vol. XXV]) 1: 1-9, with commentary on the *Preface* in 2: 339-342 (Leipzig, 1830 [Kühn, ed., *Medicorum Graecorum opera*, Vol. XXVI]).

35. See note 5 above.

The Translation

Text: M. Wellmann, ed., *Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbei De materia medica*, Praefatio, 1-9 (Wellmann, 1: 1-5).

Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus

On Materia Medica

Preface

1. Although many authors old and new, my dear Arius, have put together books on the preparation, properties, and testing of drugs, I shall try to show you that my motive in this undertaking is neither idle nor absurd, for some of my predecessors did not give a complete survey, while others took most of their information from written sources. For example, Iollas of Bithynia and Heraclides of Tarentum touched on only a small portion of the subject, entirely omitted the botanical tradition, and made no mention at all of metallic drugs and spices. Crateuas the Rootcutter and Andreas the Physician — who are apparently more precise in this aspect — omitted many exceptionally useful roots and a few herbs.

2. However, one must admit that the older authors combined the paucity of their information with precision, in contrast to recent writers like Julius Bassus, Niceratus, Petronius, Niger, and Diodotus, all followers of Asclepiades. They have condescended to describe with a mere modicum of accuracy materia medica common and well-known

to everyone, but they have noted the properties and testing of drugs only cursorily. They have not measured the activities of drugs experimentally, and in their vain prating about causation they have explained the action of an individual drug by differences among particles, as well as confusing one drug for another.

3. To take one example, Niger, who seems to be the best of them, says that spurge-resin is the juice from olive spurge which grows in Italy, and that perfoliated St. John's wort is the same as triangular St. John's wort; he says that bitter aloe is dug up in Judea, and makes many equally wrong statements in defiance of manifest truth, which proves that he took his evidence not from his own eyes but from faulty secondhand written sources. Niger and the rest also made mistakes in organization of their material, some throwing together incompatible properties, others using an alphabetical arrangement which splits off genera and properties from what most resembles them. The result is almost impossible to memorize as a unit.

4. By contrast, I have had, almost from my earliest years, an unquenchable desire to know about the materia medica, and I have travelled a great deal — you are well acquainted with my soldier's life. At your insistence I have assembled my material into five books, and I dedicate my compendium to you in fulfilment of a debt of gratitude for your sentiments toward me: for you are naturally friendly to all men of culture, especially to our fellow professionals, and particularly to me. The attitude towards you of the excellent Laecanius Bassus is no small proof of your magnanimity, as I have discovered from my association with you and from observing your enviable mutual friendship.

5. I now encourage you, and any who may chance upon my book, not to look at my verbal facility but at my careful practical experience. For I have exercised the greatest precision in getting to know most of my subject through direct observation, and in checking what was universally accepted in the written records and in making inquiries of natives in each botanical region. Furthermore I shall endeavor to use a different arrangement and describe the classes according to the properties of the individual drugs. It is, I suppose, obvious to everyone that pharmacology is a necessity, closely linked to the whole art of medicine and forging with its every part an invincible alliance. It can also continue to extend its range of preparations and mixtures and its trials on patients, for the knowledge of each individual drug has a great deal to contribute.

6. I shall also include the common and familiar materia medica in order to make my work complete. Before anything else, it is appropriate to consider the storage and collecting of individual drugs in their proper seasons, for these matters in particular determine the weakness or efficacy of drugs. For example, herbs should be gathered when the weather is excellent, for it makes a great difference if the collecting is done after recent droughts or heavy rains. Similarly, sites are important, whether they are in the mountains, high up, windswept, cold and arid, for the properties of such plants are stronger. Those of plants from flat and wet localities, in the shade and not open to the wind, are generally weaker, especially when plants are gathered in the wrong season or when they are decayed through some weakness.

7. One should not fail to note that plants often ripen either sooner or later according to the specific character of the country and the climate. Some, according to their own particular nature, bear flowers and leaves in the winter, others produce flowers twice a year. Anyone wanting experience in these matters must encounter the plants as shoots, newly emerged from the earth, plants in their prime, and plants in their decline. For someone who has come across the shoot alone cannot know the mature plant, nor if he has seen only the ripened plants can he recognize the young shoot as well. Great error

is occasionally committed by those who have not made an appropriate inspection, as a result of the changes in the form of the leaves, the varying sizes of stems, flowers and fruits, and some other characteristics.

8. Indeed, precisely for this reason, some authorities have been deceived into saying that some plants bear neither flowers, nor stem, nor fruit, like dog's tooth grass, coltsfoot, and cinquefoil. But anyone who has seen these plants often and in many places will gain a particularly precise knowledge of them. Moreover, one must realize that some medical plants keep for many years, like white and black hellebore, and that the rest are useful for up to three years. On the other hand, one should gather the medicinal plants which are like young sprouts — French lavender, wall germander, felty germander, shrubby wormwood, Gallic wormwood, marjoram, and the like — when they are swollen with seeds, and their flowers before they fall off, their fruits while they are ripe, and the seeds when they are beginning to become dry before they drop off.

9. Extract juices from plants by infusion when the stems are recently sprouted, similarly with leaves; but to gain juices and droplike gums by tapping, take the stems and cut them while in their prime. Gather roots for laying up in storage, as well as roots for juices and root barks, when the plants are beginning to shed their leaves. The clean roots should be dried out immediately in areas free from moisture, but roots with earth or clay adhering should be washed with water. Flowers and such parts that have a sweetsmelling fragrance should be laid down in small dry boxes of limewood, but occasionally they can be serviceably wrapped in papyrus or leaves to preserve their seeds. As for moist drugs, any container made from silver, glass, or horn will be suitable. An earthenware vessel is well adapted provided that it is not too thin, and, among wooden containers, those of boxwood. Copper vessels will be suitable for moist eye-drugs and for drugs prepared with vinegar, raw pitch or juniper-oil. But stow animal fats and marrows in tin containers.

Stop

Commentary

Pedanius Dioscorides: Some earlier editions and translations before Wellmann gave Dioscorides the *nomen* 'Pedacius,' the reading of the MSS. But this is very doubtful, especially for a man of obvious Greek origin, and Wellmann made the simple correction, based on the evidence of Photius, *Bibliotheca*, Cod. 178, 124a12 (latest ed. by R. Henry, *Photius: Bibliothèque: "Codices" 84-185* [Paris, 1960; Budé], 2: 184) to Pedanius. This is a good Roman *nomen* and brings Dioscorides into connection with a celebrated and distinguished family. It was the custom for a non-Roman upon gaining Roman citizenship for himself and his descendants to take as his formal *nomen* that of the man who gained the citizenship for him — in this period usually the emperor, but also often a governor or a distinguished senator. The Pedanii originally came from Barcino in Hispania Tarraconensis and rose to prominence with the wealthy L. Pedanius Secundus, *consul suffectus* in A.D. 43