

The Secrets of Alexis in Glasgow University Library MS Ferguson 7

Isabel de la Cruz-Cabanillas
Universidad de Alcalá, Spain

This article deals with a handwritten, hitherto unexplored copy of a printed text, *The Secrets of Reverend Alexis of Piedmont*, held in Glasgow University Library, MS Ferguson 7, which dates to 1565. The manuscript includes a collection of secrets by an anonymous compiler from the English translation of *De' Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio de Piemontese*, a highly popular book of secrets published in Venice in 1555 and immediately rendered into other languages, including English. The handwritten compilation proves to be a dynamic artifact which is personalized to suit the compiler's needs and ultimately becomes an independent new product.

KEYWORDS: early modern manuscript studies; Books of Secrets; MS Ferguson 7; *Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*; Girolamo Ruscelli; William Warde.

The Secrets of Alexis del Ms Ferguson 7 de la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Glasgow

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza una copia manuscrita inédita del texto impreso *The Secrets of Reverend Alexis of Piedmont*, conservada en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Glasgow, Ms Ferguson 7, fechada en 1565. El manuscrito incluye una colección de secretos por parte de un compilador anónimo extraídos de la traducción inglesa de *De' Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio de Piemontese*, un libro de secretos muy popular publicado en Venecia en 1555 y que se tradujo inmediatamente a otras lenguas, entre ellas a inglés. La recopilación manuscrita resulta ser un artefacto dinámico que se personaliza para atender a las necesidades del compilador y que finalmente se convierte en un producto nuevo e independiente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cultura manuscrita de la época moderna temprana; Libros de

The Secrets of Alexis no MS Ferguson 7 da Biblioteca da Universidade de Glasgow*

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa uma cópia manuscrita inédita de um texto impresso, *The Secrets of Reverend Alexis of Piedmont*, que se encontra no MS Ferguson 7 da Biblioteca da Universidade de Glasgow, e que data de 1565. O manuscrito inclui uma coleção de segredos elaborada por um compilador anónimo a partir da tradução para inglês de *De' Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio de Piemontese*, um livro de segredos altamente popular publicado em Veneza em 1555 e imediatamente traduzido para outras línguas, incluindo o inglês. A compilação manuscrita demonstra ser um artefacto dinâmico, personalizado de modo a servir as necessidades do compilador, e tornando-se, em última análise, num produto novo e independente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: cultura manuscrita da idade proto-moderna; Livros de Segre-

* Translation into Portuguese by Miguel Ramalhete.



secretos; Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont; dos; Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont;
Girolamo Ruscelli; William Warde. Girolamo Ruscelli; William Warde.

1. Introduction

In the early modern period, a large assortment of how-to books became popular. Thus, technical books, such as collections of recipes, household management volumes, and instructional medical texts experienced an increasing demand. Of these various medical writings, collections of recipes, experiments, and secrets¹ flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The three kinds of texts—recipes, experiments, and secrets—share structural features that identify them as belonging to the recipe genre. In fact, the definition provided by Sara Pennell and Michelle DiMeo for recipe books could apply to any of the three.² According to Francisco Alonso-Almeida (2013) and Isabel de la Cruz-Cabanillas (2017), recipes in the Early Modern English period usually have a title, which indicates the purpose. After this, a verb in the imperative mood introduces the ingredients to be used, followed by the method of preparation. The dose and duration of the treatment may also be present in medical remedies. Finally, there may be an efficacy phrase stating the validity of the preparation. Thus, the recipe genre encompasses all these types of texts, regardless of whether they could be classified specifically as a recipe, an experiment, or a secret. Therefore, the term recipe is also used to refer to secrets here.

The purpose of this article is to examine a thus-far unexplored manuscript copy from the printed English version of *The Secrets of Reverend Alexis of Piedmont*, which is located at Glasgow University Library MS Ferguson 7. The handwritten compilation proves to be a

¹ According to Eamon, secrets cannot be interpreted as “The lore of ancient sages or magi, but recipes, formulae, and ‘experiments’, often of a fairly conventional sort, associated with one of the crafts or with medicine: e.g., quenching waters for hardening steel, recipes for dyes and pigments, instructions for making drugs, and ‘practical alchemical’ formulae such as a jeweller or tinsmith might use” (1985, 27). For further details on the book of secrets, see Eamon (1984; 1985).

² “A recipe book, whether printed or manuscript, is one which collects together and communicates information about the preparation of foodstuffs, drink, medications, cosmetics, household substances and other materials, including veterinary treatments, paints and occupationally specific materials (for example, lacquers)” (Pennell and DiMeo 2013, 6).

dynamic artifact which is personalized to suit the compiler's needs and ultimately becomes an independent new product.

2. *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*

After it was first published in Italian in 1555, *The Secrets of Alexis* circulated widely in print, as attested by its numerous reprintings in Italian and translations into several languages. According to William Eamon (1994, 140), only four years after its publication, there were already 17 editions of the work. This spectacular trend continued; from 1559 to 1569, it was printed 28 times, and 13 more in the following decade. No wonder this bestseller was the perfect candidate to be rendered into other languages. Thus, the text was translated profusely. In fact, Eamon (1994, 252) records 104 editions and translations between 1555 and 1699. Furthermore, Ad Stijmann (2012, 36–47) offers details of up to 269 editions from 1558 to 1999, including the Italian editions as well as the Catalan, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Latin, Polish, and Spanish versions.³

In discussing the relevance of the book, according to Eamon, “Alessio’s most important contribution to early modern science was not his compilation of experiments but his discovery that publishing secrets was ethically superior to concealing them from the unworthy” (2011, 45). British printers and translators must have been of the same opinion, since the first translator of the work into English, William Warde, claims in his epistle to Lord Russell:

I have taken in hande to translate this noble and excellent worke called. The Secrete of the reuerende Maister, Alexis of Piemount, firste written in the Italian tongue, and after tourned into Frenche, and of late into Dutche, and nowe last of al into English, because that as well Englishemen, as Italians, Frechmen or Dutchmen, maye sucke knowledge and profit hereof. (Piemontese/Warde 1562a)

Who the author of the book of secrets was is a moot issue. Stijnman (2012, 32) mentions that while most scholars take for granted that Alessio de Piemontese was a pseudonym for the Venetian humanist Girolamo Ruscelli, some authors disagree. Eamon claims that

³ For Spanish translations, see Rey-Bueno (2005) and Sagar-García (2012); Polish versions as well as editions in other languages have been revised by Bela (1999), and Ferguson studied different English editions (1959).

Ruscelli's involvement was "in all probability as its editor and not as the original author" (1994, 140). In turn, Ferguson (1906, 22) rejects Ruscelli's authorship.⁴ Regardless of who the original author was, this study's focus is the handwritten version in MS Ferguson 7 with the purpose of investigating the motivations behind the copy, the compiler's concerns, and the use of the manuscript as a living artifact that could be personalized.

3. *The Secrets of Alexis* in Manuscript Ferguson 7

3.1. Physical description of the manuscript and its contents

The manuscript under scrutiny is referenced as GB 247 MS Ferguson 7. It is part of the collection of John Ferguson, Chemistry professor at the University of Glasgow from 1874 to 1915. Ferguson's personal library was extensive, containing approximately 18,000 volumes. After his death an important part of his collection was purchased by Glasgow University in 1921. The collection is made up of ca. 500 manuscripts and ca. 7,500 printed books datable from 1363 to 1864. The volumes in the collection are mainly about chemistry, alchemy and medicine. The manuscript under study comes from Ferguson's personal library and has been in Glasgow University Library for almost a century now.

It is a bound volume of 64 folios, which measures 22.2 cm by 15.2 cm and is written on wove paper with no watermarks. The paper has been lined in pencil. Ruling serves not only to write above each line, but also to delimit the physical boundaries of the text, since all the margins have been clearly marked. The date of composition is the second half of the sixteenth century, as the dates 1565 and 1578 have been written in the manuscript (fol. 1r and fol. 23 r, respectively). The original card boards are now contained in nineteenth-century decorated boards with maroon leather spine, on which the title is printed in gold.

⁴ "The ascription of the work to Ruscelli, will not bear examination, for it leads to two quite incompatible narratives of the origin of the book and as they both necessarily emanate from him, if he be the author, he must, in one or other, if not in both, have been strictly inaccurate. For my own part I have seen no evidence that Ruscelli was the author, but only the assertion of Muzio, which has been followed by later writers" (Ferguson 1906, 22).

The text is written in one column in a sixteenth-century secretary hand, as can be deduced by the shape of its most representative letters: “a single-lobbed” <a>, “the flat-top open laid” <g>, as explained by Jean F. Preston and Laetitia Yeandle (1999, vii); letter <e> with several types co-existing “including Greek e, open reversed e, and two-stroke e” (Petti 1977, 17) and the letters <m> and <n> with angular angles. The latter easily mistaken for <u>, since in the secretary hand, most writers usually make no distinction between one and the other. Other characteristically shaped letters are the forms of <r> and <s>. The former is depicted as a twin-stemmed form, a number 2 format and as “a left-shouldered version” (Petti 1977, 17). Regarding letter <s>, “every writer of the secretary hand systematically employs two radically different types of s—one used initially and medially, the other terminally” (Dawson and Kennedy-Skipton 1966, 15). In MS Ferguson 7 both types are found, the long <s> and a kind of sigma type in final position.

The manuscript is divided into two sections: The first one contains part of “The Secretes of y^e most reuerend maister Alexis of piemount 1565,”⁵ beginning on folio 1r and finishing on folio 20v with “Finish medicamentorum at aliorum è libro magister Alesivs de piedmont.” However, the recipes continue from folios 21r to 22v. For that reason, The Secrets of Alexis is assigned folios 1r to 22v in the online Glasgow University Library catalogue. The other item included in the same manuscript is an herbal that occupies folios 23r to 63v: “Taken out of D. Rembert dodoens phisitian to y^e Emp. his herball made anno domini 1578.”

Most likely, the intention of the MS Ferguson 7 compiler was to make a copy for personal use selecting material from two printed volumes and adapting the contents, the spelling and other linguistic matters. This practice can be seen in both texts. In the case of the Herbal, the compiler systematically summarizes the detailed information provided by Rembert Dodoens (1578) copying only the medical application of the herb in a recipe format.

Regarding the other item, The Secrets of Alexis, the recipe collection was also gathered from a printed book and shaped to the writer’s own taste. Overall, the differences between the printed English version to

⁵ When present in the manuscript, superscript letters have been preserved, whereas abbreviations have been silently expanded for clarity sake.

which the compiler would have had access and the handwritten copy are diverse in nature. The compiler in MS Ferguson 7 copied only some secrets to shape them to his needs omitting others. Could it be said that this kind of manuscript indicated the shift from the printed text to a new piece of work which had a distinctive author, content, structure, and readership?⁶

3.2. *The Book of Alexis* in Warde's edition versus MS Ferguson 7 version

Each recipe included in the manuscript has been identified in Warde's translation and compared to the printed text. For collation purposes, the revised version of Warde's first part has been used for comparison (1562a). Likewise, the printings of the second (1563) and third parts (1562b) have been employed for collation purposes.⁷

In terms of quantity, the text in MS Ferguson 7 differs from the printed text, as it only reflects a small portion of the original work. The first part of the original opens with an epistle to Lord Russell by Warde, which was not recorded in the manuscript. Nor does the MS Ferguson 7 author include any information on the life of Don Alexis, which was provided to the reader in the section that preceded the first book entitled Don Alexis vnto the gentle reader. Then, the first book is introduced with "the maner and secrete to conserue a mans youth, and to holde back olde age: and to maintaine a man alwayes in health and strength, as in the fairest flower of his age" (1562a, 1). On the whole, the first part of *The Secrets of Alexis* is organized into six books

⁶ Barbierato explores the implications of this practice, which entailed "the ubiquitous decontextualization every reader constantly made, thus creating a gap between the text and its reception that concerned even the most orthodox texts" (2011, 275–76). He even adds that "the copying process offered everyone the freedom to adapt the writings as they wished. They could select portions of the text, summarize it, insert personal considerations, amplify it, provide it with iconography or a new division in chapters, and modify its structure. Thus, the text was not simply duplicated, but ran the risk of becoming something else. People who undertook the copying for themselves, therefore, had the chance to shape it to their own needs" (2011, 268–69).

⁷ The fourth part was eventually discarded after it was confirmed that none of the secrets in this final part were included in the manuscript. This is in line with the date provided by the compiler at the beginning of the manuscript, since the fourth part was not published in English until 1569, when Richard Anbrose translated it directly from Italian.

containing an uneven number of recipes each, the distribution of which can be seen in Table 1:

| | TOPIC | NUMBER OF RECIPES |
|------------|--|-------------------|
| Book i | Medical recipes | 108 |
| Book ii | Oils and waters | 78 |
| Book iii | Preserves | 11 |
| Book iiiii | Cosmetics: waters, ointments, dyes, etc. | 54 |
| Book v | Alchemical recipes: dyes and metallurgical processes | 64 |
| Book vi | Alchemical recipes | 35 |

Table 1: Recipes in the first part of the Secrets of Alexis

On the one hand, as shown in Table 1, the number of remedies in Warde's translation of the first part of the *Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio de Piemontese* totals 350. On the other hand, disregarding the other recipe collection (20r–22v), within the limits established by the scribe for the work, MS Ferguson 7 records 194 recipes, of which 50 were directly selected from the first part of *The Secrets of Alexis* (fols 1r–9r). This means that the 144 remaining secrets mainly come from the second and third parts. A breakdown of the recipes in the second and third parts of the original *Secrets of Alexis* is shown in Table 2.

| | TOPIC | NUMBER OF RECIPES | |
|-------------|---|---|-----|
| Second part | Medical recipes; oils and waters and several alchemical recipes | 362 | |
| Third part | Book i | Medical recipes and alchemical recipes for metals | 413 |
| | Book ii | To remove spots | 16 |
| | Book iii | Alchemical recipes: dyes | 23 |
| | Book iiiii | Alchemical recipes to gild and to dye | 17 |
| | Book v | Alchemical recipes to separate metals (gold, silver, copper and others) | 33 |
| | Book vi | Oils and waters | 32 |

Table 2: Recipes in the second and third parts of *The Secrets of Alexis*

The second part contains 362 secrets and the third part includes 534. The number of recipes in the two parts totals 896. Of these, 55

secrets in MS Ferguson 7 were taken from the second part (fols 9r–14r), while the remaining 89 belong to the third part (fols 14r–20v). Again, the handwritten copy records only a small portion of the content included in the second and third parts. On the whole, of the 1,246 recipes in the original publication, approximately 15.5% of them are included in the manuscript.

The compiler of MS Ferguson 7 shows a preference for medical remedies, some of which must have been of special concern to the scribe, while others have been completely ignored. The medical recipes were for common troublesome diseases in the sixteenth century. Thus, there are remedies for discomfort in the eyes, toothache, sores, burns, abscesses, bladder stone, intestinal worms, inflammations of the skin, cough and other respiratory ailments, the plague and other disorders, such as king's evil, epilepsy, etc. The treatments may be presented in a solid, semisolid or liquid form. Along with pills, plasters and medicinal drinks, some ointments, such as "Anoyntm^t y^t healith all burning w^t fyre not leauing any scarre" on fol. 1r, and oils like "To make oyle of brimstone, to heale all manner of cankers-diseases or sores w^c com of a putrifid humor, & run continuualye, called fistules, and also to heale ould wondes" on folio 1v, are also included. In the second and third parts, there are instructions to make inks and dyes, to remove difficult stains, to produce remedies to improve memory, to kill fleas and lice, as well as to create medicines for a great variety of common ailments. Here the same tendency is followed in the selection of the material, inasmuch as most secrets are medical remedies.

In addition to Warde's preface and Don Alessio's biographical account mentioned above, the MS Ferguson 7 scribe also omits the secrets to purge evil humours (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 5), a remedy to "heal all maners of Pockes" (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 6), "To dissolue and reducte gold into a potable licoure" (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 7), "To heale an excrescens or growing vp of the fleshe, within the yarde of a man" (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 8). In fact, the first secret selected comes from Warde's page 9: "To heale al maner of inflamation and euil disposition of the liver, and by this small secrete haue been healed certaine persons, which had their faces as it were Leparie, great swollen legges, theyr handes inflamed, and rough within syde." Likewise, in the second part, after omitting the first 38 recipes, the first secret that is copied down is taken from page 6: "To

make a glew or paste y^t holdeth as fast as a nayle” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 9r).

The MS Ferguson 7 scribe thus clearly is selective, choosing the material of interest following the order in which the secrets are arranged in Warde’s translation; that is, some recipes may be skipped, but no information from previous pages ever appears. Does this mean that there was a premeditated plan about which secrets should be copied down and which were to be left out of the handwritten copy? No evidence of this is found in the manuscript.

3.3. The scribe’s identity

Although most recipes in *The Secrets of Alexis* are of a medical nature, the first part of the book was of interest to craftsmen and artisans, as well as beauty lovers, since it was one of the first works to pay extensive attention to different beauty treatments, as well as dyes and inks. However, the compiler of MS Ferguson 7 includes very little of this information, as can be seen in Table 3:

| | | SECRETS OF ALEXIS | MS FERGUSON 7 |
|----------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|
| Cosmetic recipes | Skin treatments to remove spots, wrinkles | 4 | 4 |
| | Hair treatment (e.g. dyes) | 12 | 0 |
| | Tooth, gum, breath treatments | 7 | 0 |
| | Other facial and skin treatments | 28 | 2 |
| Technical recipes | Alchemical products | 14 | 0 |
| | Paints, pigments, dyes, ink | 59 | 6 |
| | Metallurgical products | 16 | 0 |
| | Miscellaneous (glue, artificial amber) | 25 | 0 |
| | Perfumes, oils, soap, pomanders | 77 | 4 |
| Total | | 242⁸ | 15 |

Table 3: Number of cosmetic and technical recipes in the first part of *The Secrets of Alexis* and MS Ferguson 7

A lack of interest in perfumes, soaps, and other beauty products like waters contained in books two and four, as well as the cooking

⁸ The information for this column has been adapted from the table in Eamon and Paheau (1984, 336).

recipes in book three, can be observed by looking at Table 3. This fact could indicate that the author was a man rather than a woman. One must also take into consideration the masculine and feminine roles of the period, where women were responsible for the care of the household, which entailed not only looking after sick people in the domestic environment but also supervising cooking matters. This omission of secrets about cosmetics and cuisine leads to the conclusion that the compiler very probably is a man rather than a woman. In fact, the compiler entirely ignores the section from book three on preserving food. The cooking recipes are for how to confit oranges and citrons, to confit peaches, quinces, melons, walnuts and gourds, among others. The scribe in MS Ferguson 7 does include some oils, though. Sometimes, these oils serve a medical purpose, such as a myrrh oil to purge humors (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 7v), but at times the medical purpose cannot be clearly deduced from the text, as in:

Oyle of Jasemyne and Violettes

Take swete almondes well pilled and brayed, the floures of Jasemyne as much as you will, and laying them ranke vpon ranke, you shall leaue them in som moist place x dayes together or more, then take them away and presse out y^e oyle in a pressour, the virtue of the w^c oyle serueth for diuers thinges: In y^e lyke manner may you haue oile of violettes and oy^{er} floures. (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 7v)

3.4. Linguistic personalization

In addition to the topics and number of recipes selected, the personality of the scribe can be further deduced from two other features of the manuscript: his linguistic preferences and orthography. First of all, when the title in Warde's edition is too long, the scribe in MS Ferguson 7 shortens it, as in "A very goodlie secrete to dye or colour woode, of what colour a man will, which some joyners do vse that make tables and other thinges of diuers colours and do esteme it amonge them selues to be of such excellencie, that one brother will not teache it another" (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 86), which is rendered in the manuscript as: "A very goodly secrete to dye or colour wood, of what colour a man will" (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 8r).

Likewise, the scribe tends to simplify coordinated synonymic nouns to keep only one of them. Thus, *griefe* disappears in "Pylles of mayster Michaell a Scot, the which heale the griefe or payne of the

heade, be it inueterate or recent, purge the brayne, clarifye the syghte, cause a man to haue a good memorye, good colour in the face, and be also very good for many infirmities” (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 33), which is reproduced as: “Pilles of m^r mighell a scott, w^c heale the pain of the head, be it inweterate or recent, purg the brayne, clarifie the sight, cause good memorye, good colour in the face, & be also good for many infirmities” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 4v). Similarly, ciatrice as a synonym of skarre is not present in the title in MS Ferguson 7: “A synguler ointment, whiche healeth all burnynges wyth fyre, not leauing any cicatrice or skarre where it hath been” (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 9), which is rendered as: “Anoyntm^t y^t health all burning w^t fyre not leauing any scarre” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 1r).

This simplification not only occurs in the titles, but also in the selection of the recipes and in the contents. When there are two secrets for the same disease, the scribe renders the shorter one. Likewise, the author of MS Ferguson 7 often summarizes the contents of the secrets. For example, the secret “To kill and destroy fleas” in the original text reads as follows:

Take white Elebore, and steepe it in milke or sodden wine, then put to it Auripigmentum, otherwise called Arsenick or orpine, & sprinkle your house with it, and you shall destroye all the flees. Also the decoction of Eldern cast about the house worketh the like effect. (Piemontese/Warde 1563, 22)

However, the MS Ferguson 7 scribe reduces the recipe to simply “Make a decoction of elderne & cast about in the howse” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 11v). In a similar fashion, in another remedy for the same problem, the original “Take Penniriall when it is in Blossome, and burne it where the flees be, and the smell of that wyll kyll and destroy them” (Piemontese/Warde 1563, 22) has been turned into “Take penyeriall when it is in blossom & burn it when they be” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 11v).

This explains why it is not always easy to trace the original recipe. The titles do not always resemble the original, inasmuch as, when there was a previous remedy for the same disease, the title of the recipe in the manuscript reads simply another. Moreover, especially in the second and third parts, the compiler tends to read the contents, internalize them, and come up with a new linguistic formulation in the word order, paraphrasing the sentences and choosing his

preferred terms. Thus, in the third part of the book, one of the recipes “to make lutum sapientiae” reads as follows:

Take Potters earth very cleane two partes, horse dong one part, a lytle pouder of a Bricke, and the flyng of yron, and a plaster of quicke lyme: and mingle it with salte water, and the yelke of egges: and make therof a paste for to lute or clay pots withall. Or elles take drie earth, and stampe it small, and sifte, it cast vpon it some wheate flower rancke vpon rancke, and than the yelkes of Egges and Winaigre, and mingle all together. Than playster or lute glasses, pottes or limbeckes with it, and drie them in the shadowe, and they will neuer faile nor brake in the fyer. You maye also mingle it with Oxe bloode in steede of water, it is also good for that purpose. (Piemontese/Warde 1562b, 68)

In MS Ferguson 7, the first part of the recipe has completely disappeared, and the second alternative treatment is rendered as:

Take drye earth, & stamp it small, & sifte it, & cast vpon it, some wheat flower rank vpon ranke, & then the yolke of egge & vinegar & mingle all togither. Then plaster or lute glasses, pottes or limbeckes w^h it, & drye them in the shadow, & then will neuer fayle now breake in the fire. You may also mingle it w^t oxe bloude in steed of water, it is also good for that purpose. (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 20r)

In the same vein, the scribe is not interested in etymological matters and, subsequently, omits every reference to other languages. Thus, the original secret “To make an akinge tooth to fall out” reads:

Take wheate, and mixe it with the milke of the herbe called in latin Herba lactaria, in french Tintimaille: or herbe a laite, in English Spurge, that hath milke in it, in greeke Tithymalos, which is an herbe well inoughe knowen, and thereof make as it were a paste or dowe, w^t the wich you shal fill the hole of the tooth, and leaue it in a certaine tyme, and the toothe wyll fall out of it selfe. (Piemontese/Warde 1563, 74)

However, in the manuscript the information is rendered as “Take wheat, & mix it w^t the milk of spurge, & make therof a paste & fill ye holed toth therof & leaue it in a certaine tyme & the toth wyll fall out by it self” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 13r). Similarly, the instruction “Take the herbe that is called Pentaphillon or Quinquifolium, in Englishe Cinkfoyle, and braye it with any grease: and lay it vpon the place and the naile will come againe incontinent” (Piemontese/Warde 1562b, 40) is copied down as: “Take the hearb Cinkfoile & bray it w^t anye greace, & lay it vpon y^e place” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 17r).

As the manuscript is intended for personal use, the creator of MS Ferguson 7 frequently employs abbreviations for common endings, such as -er in neuer, -ur in humour and your, -es as in violetes and -us as in maruelous. The reader also finds shortenings, such as lb for pound, superscript letters, as in y^e for the, y^t for that, oy^{er} for other, w^t for with, w^c for which and the omission of nasals, which are marked with a bar on top of the preceding vowel, as in then, them and wound, among other words. All these abbreviations are widely used in the period (Dawson and Kennedy-Skipton 1966, 18–21), since this sort of adaptation is commonplace practice in manuscript writing.

Additionally, the scribe in MS Ferguson 7 continually adapts the spelling of the printed text to conform to his own taste. Thus, a secret “To make a carbuncle, & all other botches, apostumes, & plague sores to breake a present remedye & easie to make,” which appears in the manuscript as:

Take baysalt well beaten into pouder and sifted, incorporate w^t the yolk of an egg, and lay it vpon the carbuncle or sores, and be assured y^t (w^t y^e grace of god) it will draw to it self all the venym and poyson of y^e plague or sore, so y^t in short tyme he shall be cured: A remedy often times proued. (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 7r)

does not corresponds to the original spelling in Warde’s edition:

Take Bay salte well beaten into pouder and sifted, incorporate it wyth the yelke of an Egge, and laye it vpon the Carbuncle or soore, and be assured that (wyth the grace of God) it wyll drawe to it self all the venim and poyson of the plague or soore, so that in short tyme he shall be cured: A remedy often tymes proued. (1562a, 39)

While Warde (or his editor) uses capitals in several ingredients and important words, the scribe in MS Ferguson 7 does not. Likewise, Warde’s edition includes a final silent <e> in words such as laye, drawe, egge and yelke and a preference for <y> in several common words, such as wyll and wyth. In turn, the compiler of MS Ferguson 7 abbreviates that, with and the, abbreviations that do not appear in Warde’s translation.

In this respect, the compiler of MS Ferguson 7 also personalizes the vocabulary and sometimes uses a synonym instead of the original term. Similarly, in “Oyle of Bengewyne,” the last cause clause is slightly different: the MS Ferguson 7 scribe prefers the connector as, where the original uses for and, following the tendency for simplification, deintie has been omitted in the former. Likewise, the

reader will notice the differences in punctuation: MS Ferguson 7 makes use of fewer or no punctuation marks, as in this case:

Take Bengewine as much as you will, and lay it vnder a dungehill in a vyolle or glasse well stopped (so that it take no vente) by the space of fiftene or twentye dayes: Than strayne it, and kepe it in a vyole, for it is a singuler and deintie oyle. (Piemontese/Warde 1562a, 51)

Take bengewine asmoch as you will and lay it vnder a dongehill in a viole or glasse well stopped (so y^t it take no vent) by the space of 15 or 20 dayes, then streyn it and kepe it in a viole as a singuler oile. (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 7v)

Finally, with very few exceptions, the scribe of MS Ferguson 7 omits comments which are not of a proper medical nature, such as “It is a secrete that Women commonly vse” (Piemontese/Warde 1562b, 36), as well as the final efficacy phrase that is present to assure the reader of the validity of the remedy. When included, the scribe often prefers the Latin formulation, as in “et curabitur” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 16v) instead of the original “and it shalbe cured” (Piemontese/Warde 1562b, 35). The preference for Latin is patent in a title which in Warde’s edition is in English “To make a woman beare Children” (1563, 8), but is in Latin in the manuscript: “Of mulier fiat puerpera” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 9r), and in other formulas whereby “as before is sayde” (Piemontese/Warde 1562b, 62) turns into “vt predictum” (MS Ferguson 7, fol. 19v). Whoever the creator of the handwritten copy was, the fact that he translated these parts into Latin indicates the learned character of the owner and likely his familiarity with the recipe genre, since the usual formulas used in recipes were well-known to him.

4. Conclusions

The advent of the printing press helped popularize medical writings. Within that genre, books of secrets enjoyed such widespread circulation in sixteenth-century Europe that some, such as *The Secrets of Alexis*, were true bestsellers of the period. Thus, some readers even made their own handwritten copies intended for personal use. One of these handwritten versions, MS Ferguson 7, is kept in Glasgow University Library. From the examination of the manuscript several conclusions can be drawn.

First, the title can be considered inaccurate, given that the handwritten copy includes only a small portion of the secrets contained in the well-known printed book. Among the varied array of secrets included in the original *The Secrets of Alexis*, the scribe's main preferences were for medical remedies. The lack of interest in other topics included in the printed book, such as recipes to produce perfumes and soaps and to preserve food, which are completely absent in the handwritten collection, could indicate the compiler's sex. The needs and interests are more in line with those of an early modern man rather than with those of a woman from the period.

Similarly, the exploration of the content of MS Ferguson 7 suggests that the compilation is the result of a personalization of the contents. In the process of writing, the author of the manuscript did not simply duplicate the original source, but rather modified, summarized, and shaped the copy. He made a personal adaptation of the contents, the spelling and the linguistic formulation of the material.

In contrast to the printed text, which is usually considered to be invariable, handwritten recipe compilations are to be seen as dynamic artifacts that are personalized to suit the creator's needs. In this way, the manuscript becomes a flexible text, unlike its source. The printed text is susceptible to being altered according to the compiler's preferences in terms of content and linguistic formulation. This practice shows the vitality of manuscript culture at the time, as well as the interplay between the printed text and manuscript writing, whereby readers are not just scribes, but creators of new texts.

In the end, the printed text is the foundation and the necessary component for the entire compilation, even if the scribe voluntarily fails to acknowledge the modifications made. Here, the MS Ferguson 7 compiler is not a mere copyist but becomes a creator of a new text, given the plasticity and flexibility provided by the manuscript as opposed to the immutability of the printed text. This is an idea that needs further exploration in a different study. Another matter which has not been resolved is who the compiler of MS Ferguson 7 was. Unfortunately, this is one of the many secrets that remain to be revealed in the future.

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Author's contact: isabel.cruz@uah.es

Postal address: Departamento de Filología Moderna – Universidad de Alcalá de Henares
– Colegio de San José de Caracciolos – Trinidad 3 – 28801 Alcalá de Henares
(Madrid) – Spain

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