NOTES ON THE SYNTAX OF CELSUS

BY

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0. Introduction

Quintilian had no high esteem of Celsus’ intellectual capacities (mediocri vir ingenio ‘a man of very ordinary ability’, Inst. 12.11.24). However, among the authors of philosophical works he discusses in book X, Celsus’ style compares not unfavourably:

(1) Scripsit non parum multa Cornelius Celsus ... non sine cultu ac nitore ('Cornelius Celsus wrote a number of philosophical works, which have considerable grace and polish', Inst. 10.1.124).

The philosophical works mentioned by Quintilian are now lost and they probably (Barwick 1960) did not form part of the encyclopedic work to which the books on medicine belonged. Quintilian’s modestly positive') stylistic judgment, however, could well have applied to the medical works. Modern opinions on Celsus’ style vary. Bramble’s recent evaluation (The Cambridge History of Classical Literature II 1982: 493-4) is not very positive. Celsus is said to be “more stylistically accomplished than Vitruvius”, who, in turn, is said to have “left style to the experts and schools”. From a literary perspective, Celsus’ use of the language may indeed be described as disappointing. From the point of view of the content, however, a more positive judgment seems to be justified. In Duff & Duff’s Literary History (1964: 99-100), for example, Celsus’ style is judged quite positively: “It is an elegance which consists in no literary adornment beyond what comes of lucid, facile and neat exposition in sound Latin” ... “he keeps clear of contemporary mannerisms” ... “the sentences are short and direct - well adapted, without artifice, to the subject in hand. He is not concerned to

1) Barwick (1960: 242-246) shows that the words cultus and nitor apply to the middle style.