I Introduction

That Seneca was strongly influenced by Posidonius, when he wrote a number of his later epistles, is a fact generally acknowledged by modern scholarship. When it comes to defining the actual traces of that influence, however, the investigator is confronted with difficulties, which appear to be insuperable. Seneca's own individuality chooses, assimilates and adapts passages and ideas from his sources 'like bees their honey from the flowers', as he puts it himself 1), and on this account he often drives modern scholars to despair and to an utter agnosticism ... or to the contrary 2).

*) I want to thank the British Council for their scholarship, which enabled me to undertake the investigations of which this and other articles are the result.

I also seize the opportunity to express my gratitude to the Warburg Institute, London, whose fine collection of Posidoniana was of great value to my researches. Dr. C. H. Talbot, of the above institute, obliged me very much by reading most of my manuscript and correcting many of its barbarisms.

1) Ep. 84,3; the comparison is worked out in §§ 5-10, e.g. ... in unum saperem varia illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit, unde sumptum sit, alid tamen esse quam unde sumptum est, appareat... quid ergo? non intellegetur, cuius imiteris orationem? cuius argumentationem? cuius sententias? puto aliquando ne intellegi quidem posse, si ... formam suam impressit ... Another important passage is Ep. 45, 3-5: ... non enim me cuiquam emancipavi, nullius nomen fero. multum magnorum virorum iudicio credo, aliquid et meo vindico. nam illi quoque non inventa, sed quaerenda nobis reliquerunt, et invenissent forsitan necessaria, nisi et supervacua quaesissent. multum illis temporis verborum cavillatio abripuit, captiosae disputationes...

2) A few examples may be given here. E. Norden, J. Kl. Ph. Suppl. 19 (1893) p. 420: ‘Dieser Philosoph war ein viel zu grosser Meister in der Rhetorik, als dass bei seinen Expektorationen im eigentlichen Sinne von einer quellenmässigen Benützung einer bestimmten Vorlage die Rede sein kann, es lassen sich selten mehr als die Hauptströmungen kennzeichnen, in denen er sich jedesmal bewegt’. – Also the direct quotations from Posidonius arise the suspicion of K. Reinhardt, Poseidonios (München 1921) p. 331 sq: ‘Zitate sind Verschmelzungen und folglich Fälschungen. Je geistreicher ein Author ist, ein um so grösserer Zitatefälscher wird er sein ... Woher die Lust z.B. an den Epikurzitaten, die bei ihm das
On the other hand, Seneca states, that he never wilfully conceals altogether the sources of his writings and the origin of his ideas 1). We may anticipate, that this is most apparently the case in passages, where Seneca is not really interested in what he writes: above all, when he records dialectical disputes. These passages are rather dull —and Seneca thought so himself—, but, on the other hand, if studied more closely, they might provide us, for the above reason, with a more reliable starting point than the ‘more interesting’ letters do, in which inevitably Seneca’s own personality is implicated in a much higher degree. Our deductions and conclusions might prove to be of a more enjoyable and profitable character than the passages themselves.

Among the passages to be considered here, the first half of the 102nd letter was chosen as a starting point, for no other reason than that the present writer had touched upon some of its problems in his thesis on the history of the conception of glory in antiquity 2). To this thesis he refers for the general background of the actual contents of this letter; he apologizes for some inevitable repetitions.

The studies, which now follow, were determined, as regards their order, by Seneca’s text, upon which they present, in a way, a philosophical commentary with degressions and appendices.

The composition of this letter as a whole, and especially the paragraphs 1-2, 20-21 and 29-30, have been discussed in a previous article in this periodical 3).

Ansehen annehmen, als seien sie das Stoischste vom Stoischen? ... Ich schliesse also: abgesehen von wenigen vereinzelten Fragmenten und Polemiken wird aus den Briefen Senecas nicht viel für Poseidonios zu gewinnen sein, weil Poseidonios in ihnen zu oft zitiert wird’. —An entirely opposite opinion in the matter is held by I. Heinemann, who, after an ingenious but necessarily superficial investigation in 35 pages only, comes to the following conclusion: ‘Wir werden also jetzt für alle diejenigen Briefe—von 31 an—, die eine gelehrte Quelle verraten, P. als Vorlage annehmen’ ... (Poseidonios’ Metaphysische Schriften I, Breslau 1921 p. 201).

1) In the first passage quoted in note 1 on p. 57.
2) Gloria. Cicero’s opvatting van de roem en haar achtergrond in de Hellenistische wijsbegeerte en de Romeinse samenleving, with an extensive summary in English (Thesis Leyden, Rotterdam 1949); particularly relevant are pp. 48-61.