The *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* (‘Female cosmetics’) is usually regarded as Ovid’s earliest attempt at didactic elegy. The poem falls into two sections: a general introduction (1-50), in which the use of cosmetics is justified as part of the *cultus* of modern day Rome and a set of highly technical *praecepta* in the form of five recipes for skin-care preparations. As it has come down to us, the piece is only 100 lines long, and obviously fragmentary, given its abrupt ending and the absence of any formal closure—a deficiency made all the more glaring by the disproportionately long introductory passage of 50 lines. It has been suggested, on the analogy of the three books of the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Remedia Amoris*, that the complete poem may have contained up to 800 lines. Certainly, in view of the length of the introduction, it must have been a reasonable size, but 800 lines ill suits Ovid’s description *paruus* (*Ars* 3,205). A better analogy would be the first book of Virgil’s *Georgics*, a piece that Ovid certainly had in mind (see discussion below), especially in the prooemium to his poem. *Georgics* 1 is prefaced by an introduction of 42 lines and the total length of the book is 514 lines. If the *Medicamina* was likewise around 500 lines it could have accommodated an introduction of 50 verses, while still being able to be described as *paruus*, especially in comparison with the other books of Ovid’s didactic elegies.

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2) The only evidence for the dating is an allusion in *Ars* 3,205. In the introduction to his commentary (*Ovidio: I Cosmetici delle Donne* [Venice 1985]), G. Rosati argues that the poem was composed between the writing of *Ars* 1/2 and *Ars* 3 as part of Ovid’s attempt, carried out at greater length in *Ars* 3, to compensate women for the advice given to their male lovers in *Ars* 1 and 2.
3) The second section of the poem has been discussed comprehensively by P. Green, *Ars Gratia Cultus: Ovid as Beautician*, AJPh 100 (1979), 381-92.
5) Cf. Rosati, *op. cit.* in n. 2, 44. The fact that Ovid refers to it as *paruus* in
The contents of the missing section of the poem can only be guessed. Although the extant technical advice concerns only what Galen terms κοσμητικὴ τέχνη—the technique of preserving or repairing what nature gave, as opposed to κομμωτικὴ τέχνη—the morally opprobrious use of make-up to enhance appearance by artificial means, it is probable that Ovid included advice on the latter as well."

Ovid probably obtained his cosmetic recipes from a technical treatise, like those mentioned in their discussion of the topic of cosmetics by medical writers such as Galen."

In versifying a prose treatise, he is following in the tradition of the Alexandrian ‘metaphrasts’ Aratus and especially Nicander, in the Alexipharmaca and Theriaka. Although the second 50 lines of the fragment resemble Nicander in particular in their lack of adornment and attention to detailed technical exposition, they differ in the triviality of Ovid’s subject matter.

In this respect—the didactic treatment of a frivolous topic—the Medicamina has an affinity with the subgenre of didactic poems (artes) on non-serious subjects, such as were popularly composed for the Saturnalia, according to Ovid (Tr. 2,491 talia luduntur fumoso mense Decembri). Among the topics of such pieces, which included board games, swimming, and pottery, Ovid mentions cosmetics."

On the other hand, the Medicamina is a great deal more sophisticated and complex in its literary origins.

In the poem as we have it, there is a rather unsatisfactory disjunction between the two halves. Whereas the prooemium, as will be demonstrated, has much in common with Ovid’s later didactic elegies, the technical section is for the most part in the dry imper-

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Ars 3 suggests that he is making an implicit contrast between the Medicamina and Ars 3, which is 812 lines long. Other shortish didactic poems include Nicander’s Alexipharmaca (630), and Grattius’ Gymnetaica (542 lines extant: a small number are lost at the end).

6) Especially since the prooemium is concerned with justifying the use of cultus in the sense of expensive finery, which is also included in κομμωτικὴ τέχνη. See Rosati, op. cit. in n. 2, 21, B. Grillet, Les femmes et les fards dans l’antiquité grecque (Lyon 1975), 12-3.

7) The best known was the Κοσμητικά of T. Statilius Crito, the doctor of Trajan’s wife. Galen also mentions works attributed to Cleopatra and Elephantis. See Rosati, op. cit. in n. 2, 46.

8) Tr. 2,487 composita est aliis fucandi cura coloris.