THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF SENeca'S
NATURAL QUESTIONS: SOME MANUSCRIPTS RELATED TO Z

MS Z (Geneva lat. 77, 12th cent.) of Seneca's Natural Questions has aroused interest and discussion ever since A. Gercke first published some of its readings. Until now there has been no agreement among scholars about how far Z's readings are genuine, or how far they are the product of medieval conjecture (1). However, before tackling this problem (2), one should examine carefully the other MSS which are related to Z. No other MS with a complete text like Z's has yet come to light, but I have shown elsewhere that MS R (Escorial O III 2, 13th cent.), which has a composite text, is a twin of Z between 1.13.2 and 2.53.2 (3).

The purpose of the present article is to re-examine two twelfth century sources of readings similar to Z's with a view to determining whether they are independent of Z itself.

Gercke recognised that MS L (Leiden Voss. lat. F69, 12th cent.) contains a number of corrections by a second hand (L2) which are similar to Z's text. For example, L2 agrees with Z or \( \xi \) (the consensus of RZ) at the following places (where the reading of the other MSS is given first, irrespective of whether it is correct or not):


(2) I have already dealt with the problem in my unpublished Oxford D. Phil. Thesis, An Edition with Commentary of Seneca Natural Questions Book Two (1976), chapters 1-3, and intend to publish the results in a future article.

2. 1. 4 mirum] tibi mirum \( \xi L^2 \); 9. 4 remittit] proximo tradid \( \xi \): uel proximo tradit add. \( L^2 \); 30. 2 niuis] densae nius \( \xi L^2 \).

The source of \( L^2 \)'s readings is plainly a MS like \( Z \), and in fact Gercke thought it might be \( Z \) itself: "\( L^2 \) autem e \( Z \) eiusae gemello pendere nunc probauimus" (preface to Luebner edition, xxix). But Gercke does not recognise that there are places where the correction in \( L \) differs from \( Z \): for instance, at 4a. pr. 5 both \( L^1 \) and \( Z \) have arsit, which in \( L \) is corrected to ars sit; at 5. 1. 2 the corrector of \( L \) has deleted est after infusus, but \( Z \) has est. Admittedly, such corrections do not provide unambiguous proof of \( L^2 \)'s independence of \( Z \). First, it is impossible, at any rate on the microfilm of \( L \) which I possess, to tell whether such a correction is by the same hand as is responsible for the \( Z \)-like corrections, and not by the original hand of \( L \) or some third hand. Secondly, even if the same hand is at work, the scribe may have taken his corrections from more than one MS, and he may have made the occasional conjecture. In such a situation one should keep an open mind about \( L^2 \)'s independence of \( Z \). However, one passage does give more compelling evidence of \( L^2 \)'s independence:

1. 3. 7 Aristoteles idem iudicat: 'Ab omni' inquit 'leuitate acies radios suos replicat. Nihil autem est leuitus aqua et aere: ergo etiam ab aere spisso uisus noster in nos redit. Ubi uero acies hebes et infirma est, quasiislibet aeris ictu deficiet. Quidam itaque hoc genere uaelutudinis laborant ut ipsi sibi uideantur occurrere, ut ubique imaginem suam cernant. Quare? Quia infima uis ucelorum non potest perrumpere ne proximum quidem (4) aera, sed resistit (5). 8. Itaque quod in alii efficit densus aer, in his facit omnis: satis enim uael qualiscumque ad imbecillum aciem repellendum'.

qualislibet \( AB^1VDE^1FHUW \): qualislibet \( P \): quolibet \( RB^2E^2GL^1 \):
quasilbet \( L^2 \): quiuslibet \( Z \) (6).

(4) \( Z \)'s ne proximum quidem is better than the ne sibi quidem proximum of the other MSS, because, in the latter reading, sibi, which is not needed anyway, receives an unnatural emphasis. The corruption could have begun with the transposition of proximum quidem, after which sibi was inserted between ne quidem. (If this view of the text is correct, this is a conjunctive error of the MSS other than \( Z \).

(5) Gercke and subsequent editors have accepted Kroll's conjecture resistit, but it is wrong. Resistit here means 'stops, comes to a halt' (cf. 1. pr. 13, 7. 10. 2 etc.), which is perfectly appropriate: cf. deficiet above for the eye's ray fading away, rather than rebounding. Note also that Kroll's conjecture gives an ugly dactylic clausula (aera sed resistit), whereas the paradosis gives a good double trochee (sed resistit); cf. F. Muller, "Mnem." 45, 1917, 322.

(6) My sigla are those of Gercke's and Oltramare's editions with the addition of: \( R \) (explained above): D-Dublin, Trinity College 514 (13th cent.); W-Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Iat. Z. 268 (1548; 14th cent.).
Editors before Gercke read *quolibet*, which is wrong: for *quolibet*... *ictu* implies that the manner of the impact of the sight upon the air determines whether or not the sight penetrates the air; whereas the context indicates that the determining factor is not the manner of the impact but the density of the air (cf. s. 7 *aere spiss*; s. 8 the contrast between *densus aer* and *qualiscumque (aer)*). The required sense could perhaps be conveyed by Z’s *cuiuslibet*, but *qualislibet*, which focuses precisely on the quality of the air, is more appropriate, and is confirmed by *qualiscumque* in s. 8. Accordingly, Gercke and subsequent editors read *qualislibet*. Now L²’s meaningless *quaslibet* does not come from Z, nor, in view of its total lack of sense, can it be conjecture based on Z’s reading or on anything else. Furthermore, one might plausibly guess that an ancestor of Z had *quaslibet*, and *cuiuslibet* was conjectured to restore some sense. Be that as it may, L² is independent of Z, and, in all probability, of the other MSS, although *quaslibet* could be the corrector’s own blunder for *qualislibet*. But the corrector should be given the benefit of the doubt, and it should be recognised that here and elsewhere L² may be an independent witness.

We may now move on. H. Geist drew attention to Vatican Reg. lat. 1707 (13th cent.), which contains brief excerpts from the Natural Questions with a text like Z’s (7). These excerpts form part of a large florilegium of Christian and classical authors, which is found in four more MSS (8). The five MSS, with my sigla, are as follows:

a Douai, Bibl. mun. 285 (12th cent.)
b Troyes, Bibl. mun. 215 (12/13th cent.)
c Douai. Bibl. mun. 533 (12/13th cent.)
d British Museum Add. 16608 (14th cent.)
e Vatican, Reg. lat. 1707 (13th cent.).

I have collated the excerpts from the Natural Questions in all five MSS (9), and a text with apparatus is given below in the Appendix. For convenience the apparatus is divided into two parts. The first gives the variants of abcd from each other, with the exception of some insignificant orthographical variants, and some simple errors which have been corrected by the original scribes. The second part records the divergences between the reading of the excerpts (the consensus of abcd is denoted by γ) and the other MSS. Here the consensus of all the MSS besides γ Z is denoted by Ψ, and the consensus of Z Ψ by Ω. In the text, I have be-

(7) Geist, op. cit. (note 1), 20-1.
(8) I am most grateful to Madame J. Fohlen for giving me this information.
(9) I am grateful to the Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes for providing me with microfilm or photocopies of abcd; I have seen d and e myself.
gun each new extract on a new line, added references, and modernised spelling and punctuation.

These excerpts are of course too small a sample of the whole florilegium to justify any firm conclusions about the relationship between abcde, but some very provisional observations are in order. There are the following shared errors:

Errors of bcede: 1. pr. 6 effugisti] uitia add. supra lineam b, in textu cde; 3. pr. 11 a diuinorum] ad iuniorum.

Errors of cde: 3. pr. 11 conversazione] -nem; claro] cl(a)uso; pr. 12 Quid] Quod; queri] quaerere; pr. 13 nec (post infestus) non; pr. 15 spiritus] specie.

Errors of de: 3. pr. 14 uenerint] ueniunt.

These are all significant conjunctive errors (10), and, if one assumes that none of the MSS is derived from any other, they yield the following stemma:

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    y
   /\   \\
  a  x  b
 /   \   \\   \\
 c     x     d     e
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But the mutual independence of the MSS is not in all cases certain. Certainly a is not the ancestor of bcede, because at 4a. pr. 1 a adds o lucili after tecum in the text, whereas bc add the words not in the text but above the line, and de do not have them at all. Presumably γ had the words above the line or in the margin. But in these excerpts there is no evidence that cde are independent of b, and there is one indication that they may be descendants of b: for at 3. pr. 11 b appears to have the ungrammatical ad iuniorum conversatione, on which cde’s ad iuniorum conversationem could well be based. But of course more of the florilegium must be collated to establish properly the relationship of b to cde, and also that of c to de. For c’s lucere (7. 27. 5) could quite easily have been emended by conjecture, so it does not prove de’s independence of c. Neither d nor e is derived from the other, for they both have significant separative errors (e. g. 1. pr. 5 homo om. d; 4a. pr. 11 est om. e).

(10) ce’s contenta for contempta at 1. pr. 5 is purely orthographic, so not significant.
The MS relationships are of little consequence for the restoration of the text, for where the MSS differ the text is never in serious doubt: only at 3. pr. 14 is it unclear whether the original of the florilegium had ammittere or amittere. However, a reliable stemma might cast fresh light on the provenance of this florilegium. It was circulating in northern France by the end of the twelfth century, as the provenance of the three earliest MSS indicates (see below). It has been attributed to Ytier of Vassy (11), a monk at Clairvaux in the first decade of the thirteenth century, on the evidence of a subscription at the end of b. But this is wrong, for the subscription refers solely to a set of poems on monastic life which immediately precedes (12). In b the poems and the subscription are appended to the florilegium by a second hand (13), and they do not occur in any of the other MSS of the florilegium. Thus, although b itself certainly comes from Clairvaux, that does not necessarily indicate the provenance of the florilegium. MS a, which is the earliest, and has the purest text, belonged to the monastery at Anchin, and c belonged to Marchiennes, not so far away, so the florilegium may have emanated from that part of the world (14).

But now let us consider the excerpts in relation to the Natural Questions. There are no extracts from Books 2, 4b, or 5, yet the excerpts clearly follow the Grandinem book order (i.e. 4b-7, 1-4a), even though some of the excerpts are slightly out of sequence (15). The excerptor has selected passages which contain no scientific matter, but deal with ethical and theological themes, and all come from near the beginning or end of a book, where Seneca treats these themes extensively. It is characteristic of excerptors to alter words and phrases in order to render the passages intelligible out of context, and to omit words deemed non-essential: our excerpts are no exception, as the second half of the apparatus readily shows.

It also shows the affinity between γ and Z, which share the following readings (in each case the reading of the other MSS is put first, without necessarily implying that it is correct):


(12) J. Leclercq, “Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis” 12, 1956, 296-304, states what is known about Ytier, and prints the text of the poems and subscription.

(13) So Leclercq, op. cit., 296. My own inspection of photocopies of the end of the MS confirms this.

(14) d was in Liège in A. D. 1437, and I know nothing about the provenance of e.

(15) The first two excerpts, from 6. 32. 12, are in the wrong order; 1. pr. 5 precedes 7. 30. 1; 1. pr. 3 and 6 follow 1. pr. 14.
There is one certain error of Z γ here, 3. pr. 11 habes; and 6. 32. 12 mi may well be an error (see below). On the other hand, Gercke and Oltramare have rightly accepted the omission of dignum at 3. pr. 11 (deleted by Skutsch before Z's reading was known), and Oltramare is surely right to follow Z at 4a. pr. 2. In the other places Zγ are certainly or possibly right (see below on 6. 32. 12). Strictly speaking, only shared errors can prove a relationship between MSS, and Zγ share only one certain error, habes. Even if mi is an error, confusion between mi and uni (unum abbreviated) is so easy that chance coincidence is theoretically possible. However, the excerpts are brief, so the one error does suggest a relationship between Zγ, and the suggestion is strengthened by the facts that Z and the other MSS do not agree in significant error against γ, nor γ and the others against Z, and that Zγ share several unique, albeit true or plausible, readings.

γ is independent of Z, because Z has two unique errors: 3. pr. 10 habuerint (for habuerunt) could perhaps have been emended by a medieval scribe or reader, so it is not a decisive separative error, but 3. pr. 12 credito (for decreto) is. So we may conclude that Zγ derive from a common ancestor, which I call ζ, like the common ancestor of RZ. The MS relationships may be represented in the following diagram:

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  Z ---- ζ ---- R
    |       |       |
    v       v       v
   a       b       c
    |       |       |
    l2 ---- γ ---- l
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Since R (where derived from ζ) never overlaps with γ, and L2's readings are so sporadic, the interrelationships of ZKL2γ cannot be determined more precisely.

Finally, in one passage Zγ differ from each other and from the other MSS. Discussion will illustrate the value of Zγ (16):


(16) There are no relevant readings of L2 in this passage, and R is here a twin of P, i. e. not derived from ζ.
est; mors tributum officiumque mortalium est; mors malorum omnium remedium est. Optavuit illam quisquis timet. Omnibus omissis hoc unum, Lucili, meditare, ne mortis nomen reformides; effice illam tibi cogitatione multa familiarem, ut si ita tulerit possis illi et obuiam exire.


Quemadmodum? (or Quomodo?) Quid tua? must be genuine, for its style is thoroughly Senecan, there is no apparent motive for its interpolation, and the repetition of Quid tua? readily accounts for its omission by the other MSS. Here we have convincing proof that ξ contains genuine readings not found in other MSS (17). There is no way of ascertaining whether Seneca wrote Quemadmodum or Quomodo, but, since excerpts as a rule are especially prone to careless error or willful alteration, Z’s reading should be preferred.

In the next sentence one should probably follow Zγ, ...mortalium est; mors malorum... Again the style is Senecan, with the emphatic anaphora of mors, and again interpolation purely for the sake of rhetorical embellishment is implausible. The reading of the other MSS may result from a scribe’s eye jumping from mortalium to mors, producing the omission of est mors, after which it was natural to insert -que after malorum. If Zγ do have the correct text, then we have here not only evidence of genuine readings in ξ, but also a valid conjunctive error of the other MSS, indicating that they share a common ancestor (cf. note 4 above).

In the next sentence the choice between unum and mi is not entirely straightforward. Probably unum is correct, because it contrasts with omnibus; cf. Ep. 5. 1 Quod... et omnibus omissis hoc unum agis, ut...; 108. 27... et omissis ad quae duertimur in rem unam laboremus, ne...

On the other hand hoc could provide sufficient contrast with omnibus, cf. Ep. 23. 3 Hoc ante omnia fac, mi Lucili: disce gaudere. But there is no doubt that γ’s o for hoc is wrong, because Seneca never uses the emotional o in an address to the dedicatee of a book (18). One may guess that o is a deliberate alteration.

In conclusion, L2 and γ are independent descendants of ξ, which is of great importance for the text of the Natural Questions.

(17) Strangely, Z’s reading is overlooked by Oltramare in his article (cited in note 1 above) and his edition; though Geist, op. cit., 20, had earlier recorded e’s reading.

(18) In Seneca’s prose, o with a vocative of a person or deity is extremely rare. Apart from cases within a poetic quotation, there are only two examples: Ep. 55. 3...exclamabant homines, ‘o Vatia, solus scis vivere’; 97. 4 o di boni, rem perditam! Obviously neither passage supports o in NQ 6. 32. 12.
Appendix: The text of the Excerpts from the Natural Questions.

Seneca de naturalibus causis

6. 32. 12 Omnibus omissis o mi Lucili meditare ne mortis nomen reformides. Effice illam tibi cogitatione multa familiarem, ut si ita tulerit possis illi et obuiam exire.
7. 1. 4 Naturale est magis noua quam magna mirari.
27. 4 Tota mundi concordia ex discordibus constat.
27. 5 Ignorat naturae potentiam qui illi non putat aliquando licere nisi quod saepius fecit.
1. pr. 5 O quam contempta res est homo nisi supra humana surrexerit.
7. 30. 1 Egregie Aristotiles ait numquam nos uerecundiores esse debere quam cum de diis agitur.
1. pr. 13 Quid est deus? Mens uniuersi.
pr. 14 Totus est ratio.
ibid. Quo neque formosius est quicquam nec dispositius nec in proposito constantius.
pr. 3 Ipse est necessitas sua.
pr. 6 Nihil adhuc consecutus es. Multa effugisti, te nondum.
3. pr. 3 Fidelissimus est ad honesta ex paenitentia transitus.
pr. 4 Crescit animus quotiens coepit magnitudinem aspexit, et cogitavit quantum proposito, non quantum sibi supersit.
pr. 7 Secundis nemo confidat, aduersis nemo deficiat.
pr. 8 In melius aduersa, in deterius optata flectuntur.

Titulus naturabus c 6. 32. 12 non om. c1, supra lineam add. manus prima
7. 27. 5 lucere c l. pr. 5 contenta ce homo om. d pr. 14 quicquid d
pr. 3 sui c pr. 6 effugisti] uitia add. cde, supra lineam b

7. 27. 4 Tota] haec add. Ω 30. 1 Aristotiles γΨ: -teles Ζ
1. pr. 3 est] enim add. Ω
3. pr. 4 aspexit γΖ: ostendit Ψ

(19) Geist, op. cit., 49, thinks that optat and non are correct.
pr. 10 Magna ista quia parui sumus credimus. Multis rebus non ex natura sua sed ex humilitate nostra magnitudo est. Quid praecipuum in rebus humanis?

ibid. Animo omne uidisse et, qua maior nulla victoria est, uitia domuisse; innumerabiles sunt qui populos, qui urbes habuerunt in potestate, paucissimi qui se. (11) Quid est praecipuum? Ergere animum supra minas et promissa fortuna, nil dignum putare quod speres. Quid enim habes quod concupiscas? qui a deiurinorum conversazione quotiens ad humana recideris, non aliter caligabis quam quorum oculi in densam umbra ex claro sole redierint. (12) Quid est praecipuum? Posse laeto animo dura tolerare, quicquid acciderit sic lucere quasi volueris tibi accedere. Debuisses eritum si scisses omnia ex decreto dei. Nuisque quotiens ad humanam recideris, non aliter caligabis quam quotum oculi in densam umbra ex claro sole redierint. (13) Quid est praecipuum? Animus contra calamitates fortis et contumax, luxuriae non auidus, sed infestus, nec auidus periculi nec lugax, qui sciat aduersus fortunam intrepidus et inconfususque prodire, nec illius tumultu nec huius fuliore percussus. (14) Quid est praecipuum? Non admittere in animum nullum bonum petere quod ut ad te transeat aliquis dare debet aliquis amittere: optare quod sine adversario optatur, bonam mentem. Cetera magno aestimata etiam si quis domum casus attulerit sic intueri quasi exitura qua uenerint. (15) Quid est praecipuum? Altos supra fortuita spiritus extolle. Hominis meminisse, ut siue iteris scias, non futurum diu, siue infelix scias hoc te non esse si non putes.

pr. 16 Liber est qui seruitutem effugit.

pr. 17 Sibi seruire grauissima est seruitus.

3. pr. 11 concupiscas et add. b

a diuinorum conversazione ad iuniorum conversationem cde ex claro ex clauso cc: excluso d

pr. 12 Quod cde queri quaeere cde pr. 13 auersus aduersus d nec (post infestus) non cde pr. 14 admittere e: amm- abc: am- d puras pu- tas d amittere amm- ac: adm- e uenerint ueniunt de pr. 15 spiritus specie cde scias hoc (post infelix) om. d

pr. 10 in γL2 ET δ om. rell. humanis est add. Ω habuerint Ζ

pr. 11 nil γL: nihil Ψ habes γL: dignum habet Ψ redierunt Ω

pr. 12 dura γL: aduersa Ψ decreto cedro Ζ queri et add. Ω descissere γF ρ: desciscere rell.

pr. 13 auersus aduersus AVPUW: inuersus R sciat) fortunam non expectare sed facere et add. Ω fortunam om. Ω

pr. 14 animum γL: animo Ψ

pr. 15 extollere Ω fueris Εris Ω

pr. 16 est autem add. Ω seruitutem suam add. Ω
pr. 18 Primum discedamus a sordidis, deinde animum seducamus a corpore.

4a. pr. 1 Turbam rerum hominumque desiderent qui se pati nesciunt; tibi tecum optime conuenit.(2) Nec est mirum paucis istud contingere: imperiosi nobis ac molesti sumus, modo amore nostri modo taedio laboramus; infeliciem animum nunc superbia inflamus, nunc cupiditate distendimus, alias uoluptate laxamus, alias sollicitudine exurimus; quod est miserrimum, numquam sumus singuli. Necesse est itaque assidua sit in tam magno uitiorum contubernio rixa.(3) Fac ergo mi Lucili quod facere consueti: a turba te quantum potes separa, ne adulatoribus latus praebeas; artifices sunt ad captandos superiores.

pr. 4 Hoc in se habent naturale blanditiae: etiam cum reiciuntur placent.

pr. 11 Nemo mortalium tam uni dulcis est quam hic omnibus.

pr. 15 Nullum uerbum mihi quod non salua bona consciencia procederet excussum est.

pr. 18 Adice uictus parsimoniam, sermonis modestiam, aduersus minores humanitatem, aduersus maiores reuerentiam.

4a. pr. 1 optime] o lucili optime a: o lucili supra lineam add. bc pr. 11 est om. c

pr. 18 Primum γ; -mo Ψ discedemus Ω animum] ipsum quo summo magno-que opus est add. Ω seducemus Ω

4a. pr. 2 ac γ; ςi Ψ modo γ; si modo Ψ lassamus Ω

pr. 4 Habent hoc in se Ω

pr. 11 Nemo] enim add. Ω uni tam Ω

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