

# SELF-PROMOTING STRATEGIES OF AN AUTHOR THROUGH

# THE USE OF PARATEXT: THE CASE OF

# THE LYON BASED DOCTOR, LAZARE MEYSSONNIER (1611-1673)

**K**eywords  
Doctor Self-promotion Elevation Strategies Clientelism Patronage Lyon Book history

## I

ntroduction

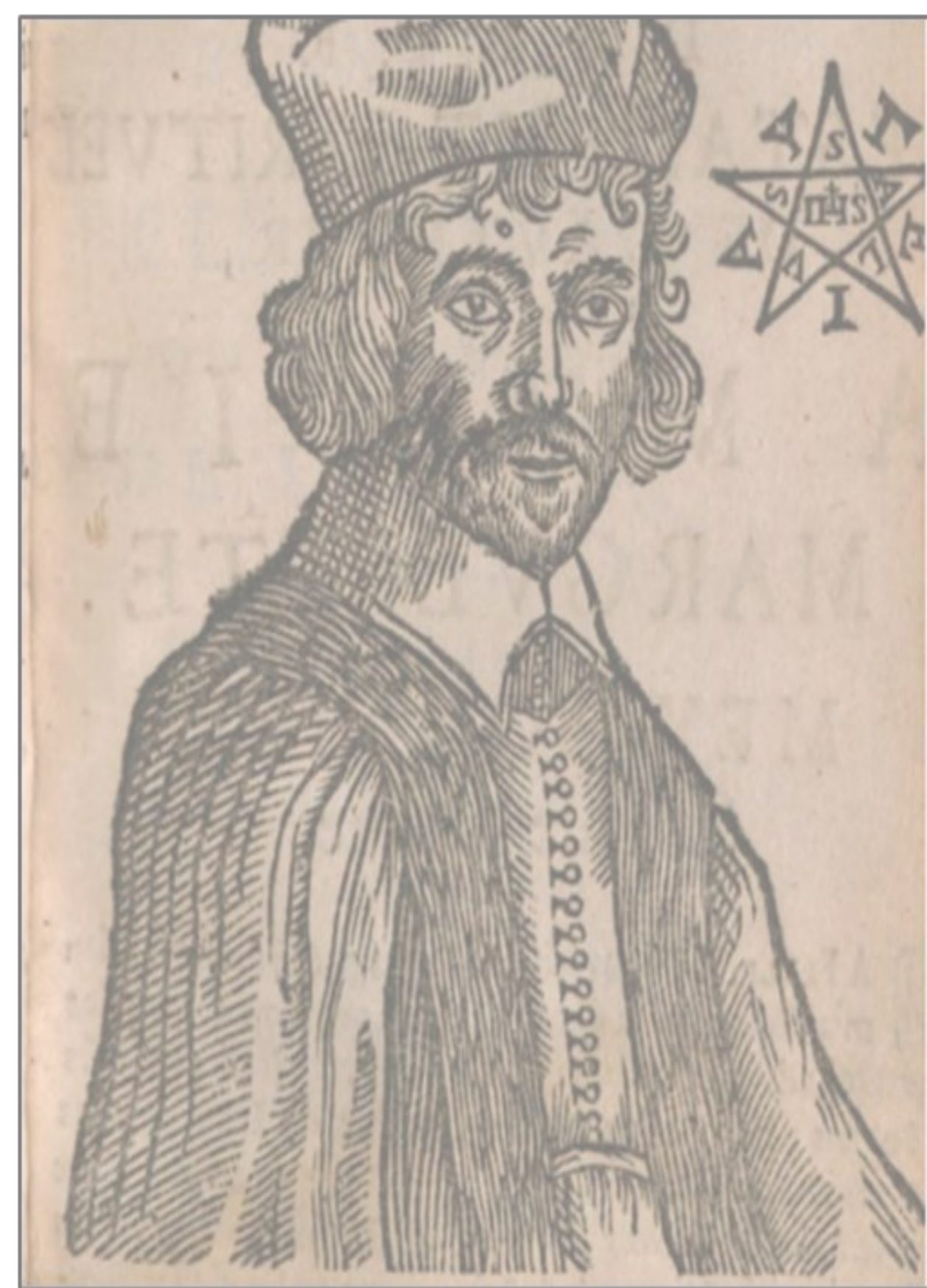
The path that led me to choose studying the life of a single individual is a simple one. I had an interest in the early modern era and I went to ask my professor (at the time), Anne Bérroujon, who talked me into studying the life and writings of a doctor that she encountered during her own research. My M1 dissertation study rely on some simple observations. To begin with, the doctor named Lazare Meyssonnier put his name on a number of printings during his life that stretched from 1611 to 1673. Furthermore, in those writings appear the will of the author to promote himself and his professional identity as a doctor in the 17th century Lyon.

My goal was then twofold. First, it was about making a biography of the life of Lazare Meyssonnier, then to rely on the course of his life to contextualize and analyze his specific way of writings as a way of social upliftment and affirmation. If the doctor was known and quoted since the 17th century, strangely enough there was no academical work purely focused on Lazare Meyssonnier and the link between the events arisen in his life and his work. Another goal of this dissertation was to humbly address this void.

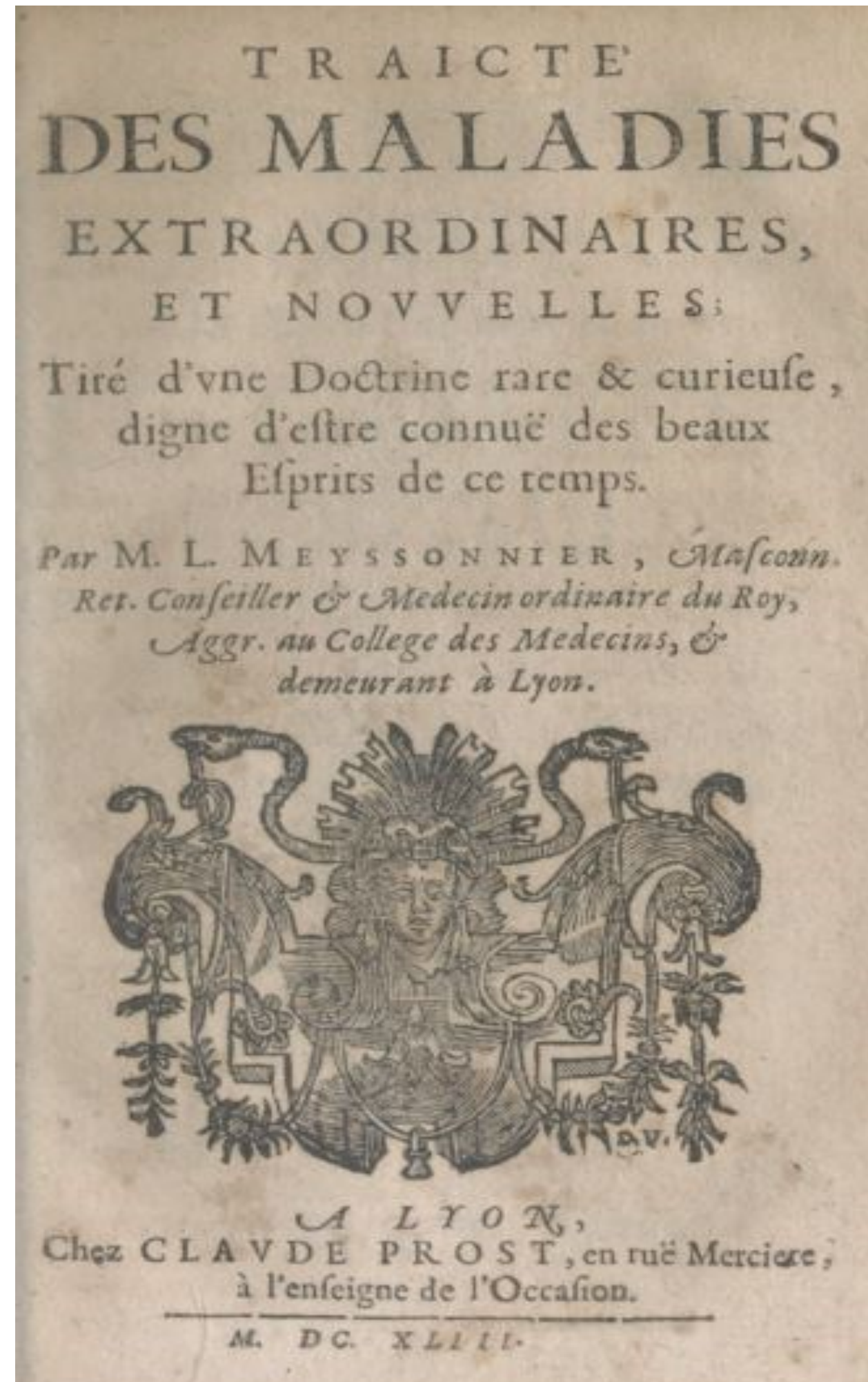


**A**bstract: My M1 History dissertation is dedicated to the life of doctor Lazare Meyssonnier (1611-1673) and to the various self-promoting strategies displayed throughout the paratext of his printed writings in the XVII e century Lyon. The study of the doctor’s writings touches on two historical fields: history of books and medical history. The development of the analysis is based on a corpus of thirty-five digitalized books available online. More precisely, it revolves around the paratext of these sources, that is: the introductions, the dedication pages, the table of contents, the notes to the readers and other textual elements surrounding the text to present it to the reader.

## M

aterials and methods

Portrait : Meyssonnier Lazare, D.D.R.C.F. Le Medecin Charitable Abbregé. Pour Guérir Toutes sortes de Maladies avec peu de Remedes. Et l'Almanach Perpetuel ou Regime Universel, Dont ce sert celuy duquel le Portrait est en la page cy-aprés pour son Salut, et Santé, & celle de ses Amis. Seconde Edition. Revue, Corrigée, et Augmentée pour le bien public. Lyon, Pierre Compagnon et Marcellin Gautherin, 1668, in-douze, 58 p.



Meyssonnier Lazare, Traicté des maladies extraordinaires et nouvelles par M. L. Meyssonnier dans, Le miroire de la beauté et santé corporelle contenant toutes les difformités, maladies tant qu'esternes, qui peuvent survenir au corps humain. Par M. Loays Guyon, sieur de La Nauche. Lyon, Claude Prost, 1643 in-octavo, 2 vol.

Lazare Meyssonnier was a very prolific author. I listed a total of a hundred entries where the name Lazare Meyssonnier was seen on the front page. For the most part, those are printed books and a great number of those are reissue and reprints of his work. The originality of this corpus was made up of accessible sources (thirty-five), specifically digitalized copies of the printed work of Lazare Meyssonnier. In order to narrow it down, I focused only on the paratext of those books. This consisted of all the text surrounding the main body of the text, that carries it and that presents it to the reader

I have organized the outline of my dissertation around two parts, the first one being a biography of the doctor (in chronological order) and the second one is focused on the strategies used by Lazare Meyssonnier in his writings to put himself forward. The guideline between those two parts is the importance of the context in the choice expressed by the writings of the doctor.

The development of the two main parts of the outline is made easier thanks to the correspondence of another doctor: Guy Patin. In those letters, only one that remains is addressed directly to Lazare Meyssonnier. However, through the discussion of G. Patin with others doctors (mainly, Charles Spon and André Falconet, both located in Lyon) Lazare Meyssonnier is mentioned an astonishing number of fifty-five times. Most of those mentions are very critical of the actions of Lazare Meyssonnier and helps contextualize and have a better understanding of the doctor. Another primary source of information relies on the will of Lazare Meyssonnier, both the first will and its updated versions have been transcribed by Anne Bérroujon.

## R

esults

From his birth in 1611 to his death in 1673, he gradually rose in the professional world of medicine. He received a doctorate from the University of Montpellier in 1632; became member to the college of doctors of Lyon in 1638 and was received ordinary physician of the king in 1642. He converted to Catholicism in 1644. Joined the Lyon Faith Propagation Company from its creation in 1659. He then, obtained an advantageous privilege that same year; became doctor of HRH Anne Louise d'Orléans in the same decade. Finally, he became a canon in 1671 and a priest in 1672.

Such a progression was supported and favored by the various strategies of Lazare Meyssonnier. He first drew from his rich and powerful clientele potential protectors including the families of Puy du Fou and Dizimieu. He cemented these relations through, through letters to the Richelieu family, he was rewarded by obtaining a patent of ordinary physician from the king in 1642 at only 31 years old. He also dedicated some of his writings to the de Villeroy a powerful family based in Lyon. Despite that, he was treated with a certain caution on the part of these two families, the de Villeroy family in particular never granted him a position of responsibility within the company of the propagation of the faith (that they created). Camille de Neufville de Villeroy even went as far as refusing him entry to the Cordeliers seminary.

Which, testifies to the limits of clientelism relations of the doctor. He then had to start a lawsuit and thanks to the intervention of the papacy he won his case; thus, testifying to both the effectiveness and the failures of this dedication strategy.

Within his writings, he installed his professional identity as a doctor by inserting references to his previous books inside a newly printed one, establishing himself as an important figure of the medical world. He also used advertising promotion of a work to be published within a work that is printed in hopes of achieving commercial success. He was very aware of the evolutions in the establishing readers public of his century thus following the general tendencies of the printed production in Lyon in the 17th century, going towards a reduction of the formats and a massive use of

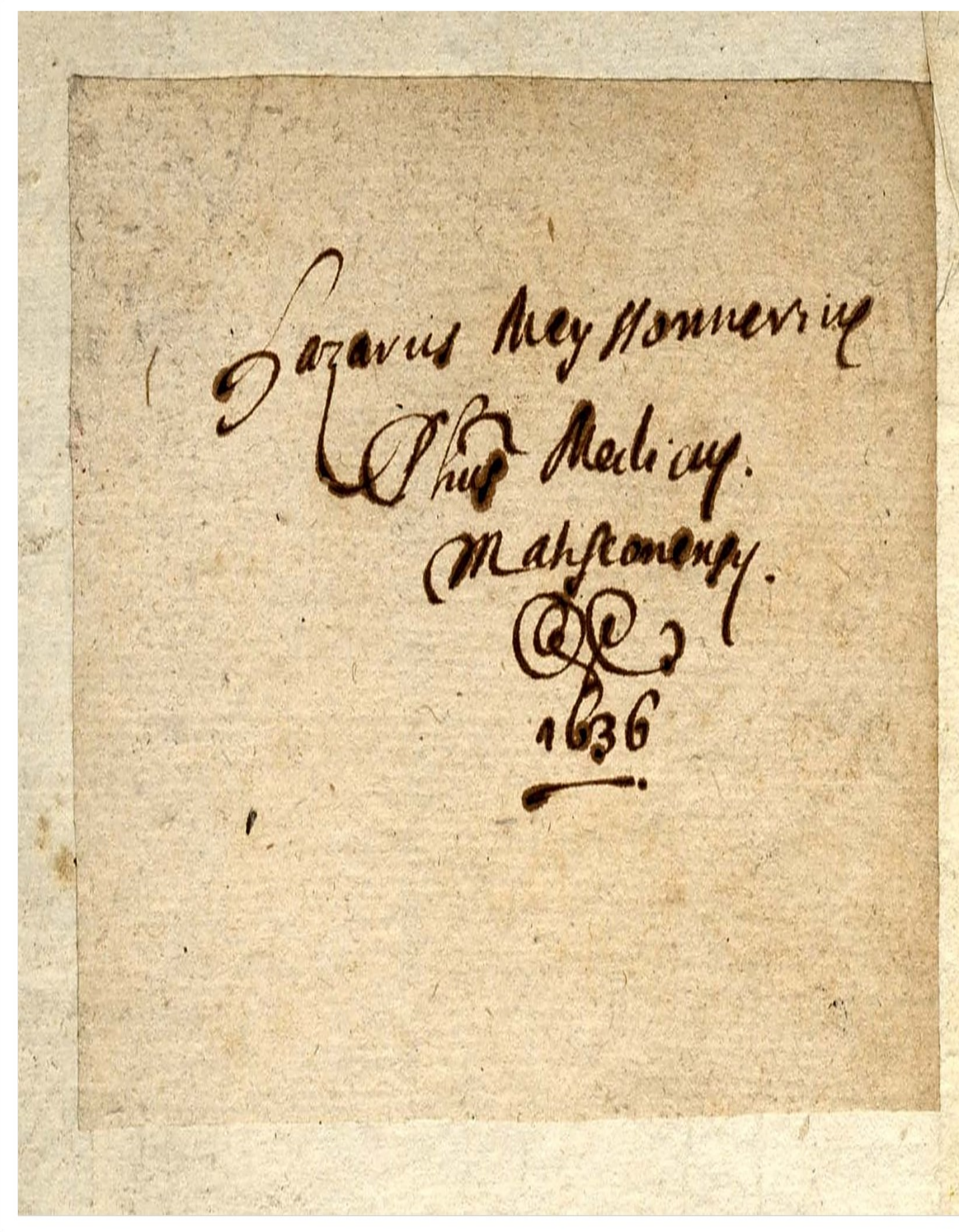
## D

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This master’s dissertation conclusion underlines the originality of that doctor and the size of his ego. This allows to take a peek inside the medical world of the 17th, a world that is not impervious to the balance of power within the rest of society. Even If the findings of that research are important, some limitations have appeared during the realization of my study, mainly, that that I did not find any point of comparison between his use of paratext and the one of other doctors.

As for new research perspectives, thanks to the the broad range of topics discussed within the work of the doctor, some new studies could easily be started. I would say that studying his relations with the republic of letters or an analysis of the topics of his writings compared to the evolutions in the field of the history of knowledge would be very rewarding.

French. He addressed his works to the widest possible audience to support his personal prestige. Finally, always with a view to securing prestige and recognition for his professional practice, he associated his name with reissues of works by authors who mostly originated from the 16th century, which he summarized, recomposed, and increased from his own productions.



L'ex libris manuscrit de Lazare Meyssonnier provient d'une source non identifiée et a été numérisé par la bibliothèque municipale de Lyon.

**A**cknowledgements:  
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**Leroy Clément.**  
M2 research poster  
Based on my first year master’s dissertation on the academical year 2019/2020  
Supervisor: **Anne Bérroujon.**

## B

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