Author(s) and reader(s) in the Supplementary Problems (Supplementa Problematorum)
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ABSTRACT
This chapter examines the interaction between authors and readers within the medical-naturalist collection of the so-called Supplementary Problems (2nd century CE, or later), with the aim of reaching an understanding of how this compilatory work may have been read and evaluated by imperial readers. Like other medical-naturalist collections of problemata, the Supplementary Problems has been relatively neglected by scholarship, not least because it lacks clear contextual information regarding its origins and readership. Its purpose is surmised to be didactic (Kapetanaki – Sharples 2006: 11), but as yet no attempt has been made to address questions pertaining to its function and readership in a systematic fashion. Accordingly, the chapter seeks to track the full gamut of author-reader relationships within the Supplementary Problems, by focussing on first-person statements, apostrophes to the reader, and strategies of explanation that point to a shared background of knowledge between reader and author, or, on the contrary, suggest the author occupies a privileged position, in terms of his command of medical-naturalist knowledge, in comparison to his envisaged reader. As the discussion shows, while didacticism certainly pervades the collection as a whole, its envisaged readers cannot in all cases be securely identified as students of medicine. Instead, we need to place the Supplementary Problems’ formation in a cultural context where medical-naturalist knowledge was exchanged and shared not only in the medical school, but also in other settings (such as the symposium and oral epideixis).

1. Medical problemata and the question of authorship

Although a considerable segment of ancient Greek and Roman medical knowledge survives in texts written in the format of the problemata, understanding the contribution such writings made to the transmission and/or dissemination of Graeco-Roman medicine can prove a challenging task, for two principal reasons: in the first instance, we have next to no concrete historical evidence about the authors and readership of such writings or the broader socio-cultural, intellectual and institutional contexts in which they were composed, consulted or studied. Secondly, their genre itself poses problems of interpretation: problemata-texts exhibit such variety in style and content, it is often hard even to proclaim with certainty that the medical topics they include are meant to be approached as specialist knowledge, rather than with a broader readership in mind.

The imperial collection of Supplementary Problems (Supplementa Problematorum) is a case in point for the difficulties described above, not least because it is a text of uncertain
authorship and chronology, and with a complicated manuscript tradition. Much like its relatively better known literary and intellectual predecessor, the pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata, the Supplementary Problems is a product of accretion, and exhibits immense learning: some of its medical enquiries engage with the Hippocratic corpus, others may well go back to Aristotle, many seem derived from the pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata, and others yet may be linked to Alexander of Aphrodisias, or to the medical school of Alexandria. Issues of intellectual paternity aside, the collection also presents interpretative difficulties in terms of its organisation and style: the distribution of problems within its three books is very uneven (22 problems in book 1, 192 problems in book 2, 49 problems in book 3), and the enquiries themselves are of variable lengths, to the effect that some resemble elaborate essays in problem-form, while others are so brief or elliptical that they resemble notes. What is more, medicine and natural science are overlapping fields across the three books, and there are even instances where medical topics are discussed side-by-side with mythical stories, or using literary quotation in order to illustrate them. What this picture suggests is that the collection is most probably a product of multiple authorship, which may imply, in turn, the co-existence of different authorial agendas as well as different types of intended readers for its contents.

In what follows, my aim will be to discuss the construction of authorial identity within the Supplementary Problems, by following the dialogue between reader(s) and author(s) within the collection. I speak in most cases of authors and readers in the plural because, as we will see, the unity and consistency of the authorial voice cannot be taken for granted across the collection, nor can its readers be presumed to have constituted a uniform group. My approach follows recent studies in the fields of Ancient Medicine and History of Science which investigate the construction of authority and expertise in ancient scientific texts through rhetorical means, or seek to reconstruct the profile of the (often elusive) readers of such texts. Moreover, I take into account recent work that sheds light on genre as a communicative matrix between author and audience in ancient scientific writing, and which also explores author-reader relationships in ancient scientific and technical texts towards the aim of understanding these texts’ self-positioning between theoretical knowledge and professional practice.

2. Authors and readers in the prefaces of the Supplementary Problems

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1 See Kapetanaki – Sharples (2006: 1-28), for a detailed discussion of these issues. As they establish (2006: 27), the earliest date for individual problems within the collection is the first two centuries CE.
5 See the studies in Erler – Heßler (2013), on the connection between argument and literary form in ancient philosophical texts; Taub (2013) and (2017), on genre in ancient scientific writing.
6 See the studies in Formisano – van der Eijk (2017).
Like their predecessor, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, imperial collections of *problemata* are assumed to have originated in the context of medical teaching, and to represent knowledge that circulated internally and was not meant to be published as a polished and self-standing literary product.\(^7\) There are certainly hints of such a connection in the *Supplementary Problems’* two prefaces, which seem underpinned by a pedagogical objective. Yet their very presence indicates that, by the imperial period, medical *problemata*-writing had acquired sufficiently independent status as a scientific genre so as to include methodological prefaces. Probably because of this, prefaces are also present in the two books of *Medical Puzzles* by pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias (2\(^{\text{nd}}\) c. CE), whose connections to the world of medical education have been recently discussed by Michiel Meeusen.\(^8\) In contrast, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* and Plutarch’s earlier imperial *Natural Questions*\(^9\) totally lack them.

Beginning with the preface to the first book of *Supplementary Problems*, its author appears self-consciously to place his text at the long end of a tradition of medical writing which, as he puts it, began with the older doctors discovering the parts of medicine in an unsystematic fashion (Oι μὲν πλείστοι τῶν παλαιότερων ἱστρῶν σιϕράδην ἐξημαν ἄκτο τῆς ἱστρικῆς). Things changed when Hippocrates, as if dispatched by a provident god,\(^10\) “gathered [medicine] together (συναξάς) when it was as one might say wandering in perplexity (πλαζομένην), and having woven it into a finished [fabric] (τελείως ἐφόρας) made it complete and fully developed by placing the head upon it (πληρῆ καὶ ἄρτιαν εἰργάσατο κεφαλήν ἔπιθεις)”. The author ascribes a self-consciously systematising agenda to Hippocrates himself, by offering an extended paraphrase of *Aphorisms* 1.1:

Perhaps he hints even at this (ὁσιος γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο αἰνίττεται) in the prologue of the *Aphorisms*, when he says “Medicine can hardly be grasped by experience; for we doctors do not encounter people’s afflictions at the time we wish to, for these things are subject to chance and to the infrequency of their occurrence. Moreover it involves risks, because the art of medicine is practised on a body which is on the one subject to flux, because of matter, and unstable, but which on the other hand possesses a divine power in the soul, and [is] not, like the other crafts, [practised] on [a body] which is lifeless and of small value. In addition to this afflictions are produced and intensified by many causes, and for this reason practice finds it difficult to decide the cause that produced them. Look, [for this reason] by including the whole [of medicine] in a bare account, without the underlying matter and not involving body, I will teach it in a short time, and on account of this I will make [you] possess an account based on understanding (φέρε τῷ λόγῳ φιλό χωρίς ὑποκειμένης ὄλης ἀσωμάτως πάσαν περιλαβόν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ διδάξω καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐπιστημονικὸν λόγον ἔχειν ποιήσω), and I will set before you


\(^8\) Meeusen (2018a). See also his chapter in this volume.


\(^10\) Possibly a Stoic notion: see Flashar (1962b) and Kapetanaki – Sharples (2006: 22-3).
all the causes together with their diagnoses, so that you can for the rest exercise the account in practice (καὶ τὰς αἰτίας πάσας ὑποθήσομαι σὸν ταῖς διαγνώσεσι πρὸς τὸ σὲ λοιπὸν τῇ πείρᾳ γυμνάζειν τὸν λόγον), and whenever you encounter any affliction by chance you can fit the account to it and exercise it and find that it is true (ὅτε δὲ ἂν σοι κατὰ τύχην περιπέσῃ τὶ πάθος ἑφαρμόζειν τὸν λόγον καὶ γυμνάζειν καὶ ἀληθῆ τοῦτον εὑρίσκειν).” (transl. Kapetanaki – Sharples)

According to Ineke Sluiter, “by means of this paraphrase our author has put an extended version of Aphorisms 1.1 in the mouth of Hippocrates: a whole programme of medical teaching is hidden in its few words.”

This teaching is construed as a dialogue between a speaker and his addressee. The speaker, Hippocrates, marked through the use of the first person, expounds the theoretical principles and limitations of the medical art to an unnamed addressee (marked through the use of the second person) in a way that specific, as well as distinct, roles are ascribed to each one of them: the teacher is someone who has mastery and overview of the subject, as well as the ability to offer a quick access route to it (πᾶσαν περιλαβὸν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ διδάξω). The recipient’s role is to comprehend the medical art’s principles in a systematic fashion (διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἑπιστημονικῶν λόγων ἐξειν ποιήσω) in order successfully to apply them in practice, towards diagnosing diseases and understanding their causes (τῇ πείρᾳ γυμνάζειν τὸν λόγον, ἑφαρμόζειν τὸν λόγον καὶ γυμνάζειν καὶ ἀληθῆ τοῦτον εὑρίσκειν).

Through this model relationship between teacher-pupil, the process of knowledge transmission is established as key to the Supplementary Problems’ own function: the reader of the collection can anchor his reading experience to this model relationship, by putting himself in the position of pupil-learner. The process moreover bears the stamp of Hippocrates’ medical authority, and in this way grants the authorial voice that transmits this knowledge in the remainder of the collection an analogous authoritative status. The act of paraphrasing Aphorisms 1.1, and the use of the verb αἰνίτεθα in the preface, together with the rest of the Hippocrates-exegesis that we find in the preface, suggests the narrator has a privileged position in comparison to his readers: he is able to access Hippocrates’ true or hidden meanings, and make them available (just like a teacher does) to those unfamiliar with them.

It is perhaps no accident that the author has chosen the Hippocratic Aphorisms as his reference-point: the Aphorisms are a collection of diverse medical knowledge, which lacks a table of contents and a clear organisational principle, much like the collection of Supplementary Problems itself. The author of the Supplementary Problems’ first preface however, offers a reading programme for this text, based on which the reader gains an understanding of its contents cumulatively, through a process of consecutive reading:

11 Sluiter (1994: 272). Cf. Aphorisms 1.1: “Life is short, the Art long, opportunity fleeting, experiment treacherous, judgment difficult. The physician must be ready, not only to do his duty himself, but also to secure the co-operation of the patient, of the attendants and of externals.” (Ὁ βίος βραχός, ἥ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὡς, ἦ δὲ πείρα σφαληρή, ἦ δὲ κρίσις σαλπηρὴ. Δεῖ δὲ ὁ μόνον ἑωτόν παρέχειν τὰ ἄλοντα ποιεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν νοσεόντα, καὶ τοὺς παρεόντας, καὶ τὰ ἔξωθεν.) Transl. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library. See also Flashar (1962b).
They [sc. the Aphorisms] are both discrete and continuous (ἔχουσι δὲ καὶ τὸ διωρισμένον καὶ τὸ συνεχεῖς), and this too is a token of complete excellence; for as in the case of geometry, so with them too, if it so chance, the fifth clarifies the fourth (ὁ πέμπτος τὸν τέταρτον σαφηνίζει) and the fourth the third and the third the second, and so on. And as he proceeds he makes this clear by keeping to the order of the account (τὴν τάξιν φυλάττων τοῦ λόγου) and the sequence of cause[s] in respect of periods of life or seasons and afflictions and the like. (transl. Kapetanaki – Sharples)

It would be intriguing to consider whether this reading programme may be applying to the Supplementary Problems’ own heterogeneous contents: how far may its author be prompting his readers to consider a similar connection between the seemingly discrete enquiries that comprise his own text? The answer, as we will see, relies on our understanding of which portion of the problems that comprise the collection the author of this preface actually has in mind.

The existence of an authorial programme may be surmised by the collection’s second preface, located after the first 38 problems of book 2:

For the rest, then, it is time to go through the common symptoms (Λοιπὸν τοῖνον περὶ τῶν κοινῶν συμπτωμάτων διελθὲν καὶ όρος) (by common symptoms we mean those which for the most part occur at any age), for example about dizziness and sneezes and yawning, also hiccoughs and giddiness and belching and all such things, as to why they themselves come about and in what condition of body and why some of these resolve each other and some do not, and in what sort of people they cause difficulty; and after this about bald people and loss of hair, and in general why hair and nails grow and perish, and on what occasions, and why hair is black or red or white; and in addition to these about voice and the things that happen to voices, for example why they are high or deep and how they are fractured and why some people speak through their nostrils; and again about hearing and smell and laughter, and then about nausea and why some people suffer from it and some do not, and what sort of people [do so] most. (transl. Kapetanaki – Sharples)

The second preface introduces the reader to a set of topics in book 2 which the narrator groups together under the label of “common symptoms” (explained as symptoms that tend to occur at any age). The label itself may explain the presence of the preface at this precise point in the collection, as it helps to unify under a single rubric biological functions and pathological conditions related to them that are otherwise extremely diverse. The narrator offers an overview of the main topics the rest of the problems of book 2 will treat, in an order that, for the most part, is closely matched by the actual problems that follow (2.39-2.53: yawning, sneezing, hiccups; 2.54-2.82: hair and nails; 2.83-2.97: voice and sound; 2.98-

12 On the term σύμπτωμα in ancient medical writing, see Holmes (2015).
In this way, and as far as the aspect of textual organisation is concerned, the preface serves to underscore the author’s control over his text and its contents, as well as his ability to guide his readers through the collection’s heterogeneous subject-matter, by introducing scientific concepts through which diverse phenomena can be grasped, studied and perhaps also memorised (an aim hinted at in preface 1 as well).

It is clear, then, that, if taken together, the two prefaces point to a communicative framework between author and reader/addressee that grants the author a privileged standpoint in terms of his command of the text and his knowledge and understanding of the medical art itself, while placing the reader in the position of pupil or learner, who is invited to gain, for all the Supplementary Problems’ seeming incoherence, a thorough grasp of the medical art through its contents. Yet as we will see, the didacticism that pervades both of them does not necessarily or exclusively entail a narrow association of the collection with medical teaching. Indeed, as I will argue in the next section, such a connection cannot be taken for granted for all problems, some of which may equally plausibly be associated with other contexts, such as rhetorical performance, or even with social occasions involving the display of knowledge, such as the symposium. Indeed, we possess ample testimony on the use of problemata-literature in precisely such contexts during the imperial period: Plutarch’s Table Talk, for one, embeds many naturalist and medical problems in learned conversations purported to have taken place at symposia. Moreover, both the Table Talk and the miscellany Attic Nights by Aulus Gellius depict communities of learned imperial readers engaging with collections of medical and naturalist problems attributed to Aristotle, either by teaching them to pupils of philosophy or simply by criticising and evaluating their contents and approach, in a manner that strongly suggests that medicine and natural science did not belong to the exclusive realm of specialists during their time. The last point is further corroborated by the testimony of Galen, whose anatomical demonstrations and theoretical expositions of the medical art’s principles often addressed the general public. In light of this, it would be more productive to view the roles of teacher and pupil in the prefaces as tropes which facilitate the transmission of medical knowledge, without necessarily or always seeking to link this transmission exclusively with the medical school.

3. Discordant authorial agendas in the Supplementary Problems

Seen as a whole, the problems contained within the collection of Supplementary Problems exhibit a blend of medical and naturalist investigation: they explore biological functions, explain the causes of certain illnesses or pathologies, discuss anatomical features, concern themselves with the humours and with pharmaceutical or nutritional substances (milk, wine,
honey) in connection to functions such as digestion, and also include enquiries into the environment or the weather (e.g. sea water, 2.22, 2.34). This approach is characteristic of book 1 and the first part of book 2 (2.1-2.38). Part of the remainder of book 2 treats the so-called “common symptoms” (2.39-2.126: see above), while 2.127-137 discuss four-footed animals in general, with 2.138-2.161 focusing on pigs, and 2.162-2.192 on horses, mules and donkeys. The topics of book 3 continue in the same style of blending medical and naturalist topics, with a special emphasis on plants and liquids (especially wine and olive oil [3.9-3.29], including problems pertaining to water, milk and eggs [3.30-3.42]). Its last part (3.43-3.49) includes enquiries that treat cultural practices (in relation to the use of foods or plants), ethnography, geography and meteorology.

Overall, the thematic grouping of problems is done in a manner that is reminiscent of the book-divisions found in the pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata. Moreover, one can detect a hierarchy of topics, starting from humans, continuing with animals and concluding with the plant world and inanimate substances, in a style that is akin to the hierarchy of nature that we find in encyclopaedic works such as Pliny the Elder’s Natural History. At any rate, what is clear is that neither of the two prefaces fully or accurately describes the content of the collection in its entirety: the author of the first preface, as we saw, uses Hippocrates’ Aphorisms as a means of proclaiming his aim to teach the medical art (whose realm he appears to restrict to the investigation of afflictions and their causes). Only the first book and parts of book 2, which are devoted to the investigation of illnesses, can be plausibly argued to fulfil this aim. Similarly, the summary of contents provided by the preface to the second part of book 2 only applies to a segment of the second book’s contents (up to problem 2.126; thereafter, a completely different set of topics follows, which cannot be encompassed under the label of “common symptoms”). This fact strongly cautions against hasty assumptions about the work’s unity. It also means that even the paedagogical aim proclaimed in preface 1 does not necessarily apply to the work as a whole, and that we need to keep an open mind about the contexts and aims that may have underpinned the composition of its various sections.

Authorial voice is a key tool which allows access to the different agendas that underpin the various problems. The evidence is unfortunately meagre, as, for the most part, the Supplementary Problems is composed in the impersonal, or ‘objective’ style that is the hallmark of antiquity’s problemata-collections: most problems are introduced as sequences of why-questions, to which the answers provide facts, without a distinctive personal self-positioning on the author’s part. This is especially noticeable, but not exclusively present, in the brief problems that comprise a significant portion of the collection, especially in books 2 and 3, an example of which is problem 3.8:

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17 Pliny’s view of nature is rooted in a Stoic background, on which see esp. Beagon (1992: 26-54). Cf. the possibility of Stoic influence in the preface to book 1 of the Suppl. Probl., where reference is made to a provident god. See Flashar (1962b) and Kapetanaki – Sharples (2006: 22-3).
19 See Oikonomopoulou (2013b).
20 See Oikonomopoulou (2013b).
Why if cold loaves (οἱ ψυχροὶ ἄρτοι) which have been wetted touch each other do they not coalesce, but hot ones do? Is it because the cold ones have emitted the sticky moisture in them along with the steam (τὸ ἐν ᾧτοῖς γλίσχρον), and when this has departed they do not stick, but the hot ones have a certain stickiness? (transl. Kapetanaki – Sharples)

In a similar fashion to several books of the pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata, as well as Plutarch’s collection of Natural Questions, the author of this particular enquiry poses as a natural scientist whose observations cover all activities of everyday life (such as bread-making). Moreover, given that the source of this enquiry is almost certainly pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata 21.6 (927a-b), it is clear that the author of the enquiry is a scientist who actively engages with the Peripatetic tradition of writing scientific problemata, and composes his own enquiries in a style that emulates their scientific mindset and approach.

We can compare with an equally brief problem in the same book, which embeds perspective (3.2):

Why do they plant nut-trees especially on tombs? (Διὰ τί ἐπὶ τῶν μνημάτων μᾶλλον τὰς καρύας φυτεύουσιν;) Is it because they bear fruit that is like caskets? Or is it because it most of all trees sheds tears, which we give as a offering to the dead? (ὁ τοῖς τελευτῶσιν ἀποδίδομεν γέρας;) (transl. Kapetanaki-Sharples)

The author’s use of the third person plural (“they”) in the first explanation that is offered effectively distances him from the community which follows the custom of planting nut-trees on tombs, while his use of the first person plural (“we”) in the second explanation suggests he shares with the same community the burial custom of offering tears to the dead (notably, the shedding of tears is not referred to simply as a common human emotional response to grief: the phrasing [ἀποδίδομεν γέρας] is such that links tears to ritual, and therefore to practices that are culturally specific). We can explain this variant use of persons in terms of the hierarchy of roles the author assumes in this brief enquiry: even though he is clearly a member of the cultural community whose customs he observes, he foregrounds his role as a distanced observer, for whom cultural practices, insofar as they involve nature (plants) or biological functions (tears) can be subjected to scientific investigation. Yet there is a marked difference in approach, compared to the previous problem, in that the author here does not offer a rigorous scientific explanation: he does not use scientific terms (such as γλίσχρος in the problem above), and, even though he is clearly knowledgeable in plants, he does not seize the opportunity to offer (even as a side-point) a scientific explanation for the nut-tree’s shedding of tears. His key priority instead is to use scientific observation as a tool for explaining cultural practice. This is a characteristic example of an enquiry which cannot be exclusively yoked to the medical school (although its provenance in the scientific interests of doctors and natural scientists cannot be denied), but resembles some of the investigations that
Thus, we can surmise that especially problems such as this could be adapted to various performative contexts, one of which might well have been the learned symposium of the imperial era.

Most striking of all cases within the Supplementary Problems is problem 1.17, in which the author, in the context of a discussion that pertains to drunkenness, includes a lengthy allegorical interpretation of the myth of Dionysus.

Why does the general public (ὁ πολὺς δήμος) say of drinking bouts that wine is dissolved by wine, [i.e.] the resultant headache? I say that this is laymen’s talk, but still true (Φημὶ τοῦτο ἰδιωτικὸν μέν, ἄληθες δὲ τυγχάνειν). The great heat of the wine produces relaxation of the [bodily] parts; more wine, entering in and expelling this [relaxation], strengthens them and equips them to chase away and beat off the vapours that have been brought together by it and weigh down the head and the body. It is the wine most mixed [with water] that removes the heat of the previous [wine] which brought about the relaxation. For a small quantity of wine when drunk produces health, a moderate amount cheerfulness, too much drunkenness and madness, as Theognis the poet said when he spoke about a moderate [amount of] wine:

Much wine is bad when drunk: but if someone drinks it wisely, it is not bad, but good.

And for this reason it is not without consideration that they say in the myths (ὁθεν οὐκ ἁσκόπως μιθεύομαι) that a Bacchant accompanies Dionysus because wine leads to dancing, the Satyrs because [it leads to] ease of movement; a Lydian female because some are relaxed (released, ekluesthai) by it; a leopard because of the variegated imagination of those who are drunk (for each of them takes on a different and variegated [mode of] reasoning when affected by the wine; and the skin of the animal too is variegated); a single Bacchant who went mad and committed murder, Agave the mother of Pentheus (for many when excessively drunk have turned to murder). [They speak of] Dionysus as naked because of the revelation of the thought of those who drink that is brought about by wine. [They say that] he fell in love with Aphrodite and Ariadne (for those who are drunk are characterised by very great desire for women) (τοῖς γὰρ οἶνοις παρέπεται πλείστη γυναικών ἐπιθυμία). He has a certain bald person [as companion] because much wine greatly lays waste and harms and withers (μαραίνειν) the brain (διὰ τὸ μάλαστα τῶν ἐγκέφαλον ἑρμηνευ καὶ βλάπτειν καὶ μαραίνειν τῶν πολλῶν οἴνων), for which reason they also called him Maron. He also has Pan as a companion, that is: the power of wine is universal, or again because of the differing colour and power of wine (for [Pan] too has many shapes and many colours). [They say that] Dionysus was struck by a thunderbolt and placed in a thigh because

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21 See, e.g. 1.5, 1.9, 3.10, 6.6. Also Oikonomopoulou (2011: 114-7); Meeusen (2018b).
often wine which has been warmed by the sun is perfected in its blending and power while concealed in a jar (διότι πολλάκις ὁ οἶνος ἡλιαζόμενος τελειοῦται τῇ κράσει καὶ τῇ δυνάμει τῶς κεράμος κρυπτόμενος). [They say that] four women are his sisters because wine undergoes four changes and transformations (διὰ τὸ τέσσαρας τροπὰς ἔχειν καὶ μεταβολὰς τὸν οἶνον).

Hear also concerning Pan, that they intend him to be the whole (pan) of the world (Ἄκουε δὲ καὶ περὶ τοῦ Πανός, ὅτι βούλονται αὐτὸν εἶναι τὸ πᾶν τοῦ κόσμου·). […] (transl. Kapetanaki – Sharples)

The enquiry investigates a popular remedy for drunkenness, which involves the consumption of wine as a cure for hangover. Although the author clearly has a dismissive view of the laypeople (ὁ πολὺς δήμος), nevertheless he finds their prescribed remedy correct (Φημὶ τοῦτο ἱδωτικὸν μὲν, ἀληθές δὲ τυχάνειν) and seeks to provide a scientific explanation for its efficacy. However, he does not restrict himself to scientific means of argumentation: he strengthens his point about the virtue of moderate wine consumption by quoting Theognis (ll. 509-510) and then goes on to provide an allegorical reading of the myth of Dionysus, different aspects of which he interprets as allusions to wine’s various effects on the human body (such as increased sexual appetite, seen to be encoded in the mythical love affairs of Dionysus with Aphrodite and Ariadne). His allegorical explanation includes etymologies of the names of Dionysus’ followers (Maron’s name is etymologically associated with the verb μαραίνειν, and thus thought to refer to wine’s ‘withering’ effect on the mind, while Pan’s name is derived from the adjective πᾶν, and thus thought to refer to wine’s universal power, or, alternatively, to wine’s many different colours). The cosmic associations of Pan’s name are themselves the subject of detailed investigation (not cited here): the god’s two horns stand for the dual nature of the universe (male and female, corresponding to the sun and moon, respectively); his bimorphism (half-human and half-animal) corresponds to the division of the universe into the rational (upper) and irrational (lower) part; his constant movement stands for the instability of matter; and his love for Echo stands for the heavenly sphere’s love of harmony. The enquiry concludes by bringing the properties of blood into the discussion, and examining its four parts as analogous to wine’s own four parts.

This remarkable use of allegory tailored to a medical explanation makes this problem unique in our collection, in that it draws a complex authorial persona in dialogue with his readers: by distancing himself from the laypeople, the author foregrounds his own self-positioning as a specialist on the one hand, and as someone who can access, thanks to his philosophical education, the hidden meanings of myths. Much like the speaker of the preface to book 1, who boasts privileged access to Hippocrates’ covert meanings, our author too is able to access the medical knowledge pertaining to the effects of wine that is hidden under the surface of widely disseminated mythical stories about the god Dionysus. The author’s use of allegory points to a Neoplatonist point of view (particularly evident in his discussion of the god Pan), and likely also contact with Dionysian religion (particularly in the references to

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Semele and Dionysus’ birth from Zeus’ thigh, which may allude to the Orphic myth of Zagreus, itself instrumental to Neoplatonist interpreters of the Dionysus myth. Further, the author’s use of poetic quotation, which at first glance seems redundant in the context of his enquiry, serves to showcase his command of literary paideia, and thus to yield further affirmation of his authoritative credentials.

Another distinctive feature is the communicative framework that underpins the enquiry: the author underlines his personal point of view through the use of the verb ἐρω ("I argue"), and addresses his readers directly when he moves on to explicating the cosmic associations of Pan’s name, by apostrophising them through the use of the imperative ἀκοε ("hear"). The choice of verbs evokes a context of oral performance, perhaps connected with medical teaching, but without precluding the possibility of a wider audience. The latter possibility may also be surmised from the fact that the topic – drunkenness – comes from the realm of common experience, from the elegant use of ring composition (the enquiry begins with the biological effects of wine as a remedy for drunkenness, and concludes with blood, seen as a substance that is analogous to wine, in terms of its properties), from the fact that a quotation from archaic symposiastic poetry is used in a manner that demonstrates the author’s dialogue with the literary past, as well as from the fact that the explanation has a clear architecture (progressing in a seamless fashion from science to philosophy) and exhibits clarity as well as precision in its scientific and philosophical language. These features render the enquiry an elegant showpiece of philosophical, as well as scientific reasoning in a style that seems well-suited to a context of epideictic display.

4. Authors and readers in dialogue

As I already mentioned, instances such as those of problems 1.17 and 3.2, where scientific enquiries are infused with perspective, are in fact a minority within the Supplementary Problems as a whole, in a way that they do not provide sufficient ground towards an argument for a strategic employment of the author’s voice within the collection. Nevertheless, they are often revealing of the multiplicity of identities assumed by the author(s) of the collection. We can observe these by focussing on the use of persons across the collections, through which the author refers to himself, to others, or to his readers. I have

24 See detailed discussion of the Dionysus-myth in Neoplatonism by Hernández de la Fuente (2014), who also mentions Plu., De Is. et Os. 13 (where Dionysus is associated with the Egyptian god Osiris). Cf. also Quaest. conv. 4.6 (where Dionysus is associated with the god of the Jews).
26 Cf. Xen., Smp. 2.4.
27 On medicine and the culture of epideictic display in the imperial period, see von Staden (1997), Mattern (2008: 69-97); Gleason (2009), focusing on Galen and the Second Sophistic’s culture of epideixis in particular.
28 All translations from the ancient Greek text of the Suppl. Probl. in this section are cited from Kapetanaki-Sharples (2006).
collected all the relevant examples below, followed in each case by an interpretation of their rhetorical function and significance.

Table A. First-person singular statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Preface</th>
<th>I say (φημι), [see above]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>I say that (φημί ὃτι) of itself it [sc. honey] is not pungent but well-blended, but the tongue, warming it by its own heat, changes it to be more pungent […]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>I say that (λέγω ὃτι) inasmuch as it has changed from blood, in this respect milk changes more easily back to this again, and is virtually blood that has been turned white.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>And, if you will allow me to say it (εἰ μοι συγχωροίης εἰπεῖν), [the egg] seems to resemble the universe […]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>I say that (φημί ὃτι) the phlegm does not rise up of itself […]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>I say that (φημί ὃτι) as many as were allotted a short life by the movement of the stars at their birth are more swiftly tested and caught when affected by the plague […]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>I say that (φημί ὃτι) this is laymen’s talk, but still true. [see above].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>For this shape [sc. the sphere] is more perfect in god’s eyes than all [other] shapes, I mean (λέγω ὅ) square cubic pyramidal cylindrical egg-shaped lens-shaped and the like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.165</td>
<td>Is it because the tail gives an indication when described in this way or that, I mean for example (λέγω δ’ ὁλον) straight and turned up or moving or still?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>Or is it because the hands are hotter and moister, the feet the coldest parts of the body, and such parts are [colder] than the others, I mean (λέγω δ’ ὁλον) hairs and nails?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The verbs λέγω and φηµί, used almost formulaically, mark the author’s personal viewpoint:29
In the few examples in which they are used the author refers to himself in the first person singular either in order to clarify his scientific viewpoint or statements, introduce examples by way of illustration (e.g. 1.19 and 2.165: λέγω δή, λέγω δ’ οἶνον, respectively), or in order rhetorically to reinforce the points that he makes. It is no accident that such statements surface in problems that are elaborate and polished compositions (hence the fact that they are located in the first two books), resembling short essays in problem-form, with ample space for expounding theoretical concepts and providing illustration through examples. In such cases, the author’s voice functions as a rhetorical construct which places the reader in a context of scientific exposition delivered by an expert whose role is to argue convincingly or explain his terms. The oral context of medical teaching is a plausible context for such enquiries, although, precisely because they are rhetorically elaborate compositions, their adaptability to other contexts of oral communication (such as the symposium) cannot be precluded (cf. the case of problem 2.123, partly discussed below).30

Table B. First-person plural statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Why, in the case of continuous fevers, do we not wash (οὗ λοῦσαµεν) [the patients] when the fever is abating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>For as we have explained (ὅσπερ γὰρ ἐξεδέµεθα) that wine has four parts, in the same way also does blood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6, 2.16, 2.17, 2.27, 2.39, 2.40, 2.41, 2.84, 2.101 (in all cases, verbs are used in the first person plural to refer to biological functions common to all humans, and particularly to the function of the human senses)</td>
<td>E.g. 2.6: we belch (ἐρευγόµεθα); 2.16: we pass wind (ἅποπνέοµεν); 2.17: we shiver slightly (ὑποφρίττοµεν); 2.39: We become dizzy (ιλιγγιέµεν), we look up (ἀνοι βλέποµεν); 2.84: we hear (ἐξακούµεν, ἀκούµεν).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>Why do we find (εὐρίσκοµεν) fresh water when we dig on the sea-shore?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>Why do we carry loads (τὰ φορτία φέροµεν) on our left shoulders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.122</td>
<td>Why do we not give (προσφέροµεν) food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

immediately to those who have engaged in gymnastics or consumed drugs?

2.123 Or is it that they [sc. physical excretions] are not up to us, and the former things [sc. the pleasures of eating and drinking] are? (Ἢ ὅτι οὐκ ἔφ' ἡμῖν, ἐκείνα δὲ ἔφ' ἡμῖν;)

3.31 So we say (λέγομεν οὖν) that [animals] that are white concoct the nourishment because of their heat […]

In this type of authorial statement, most significant are the several examples where the first-person plural is used by the author to refer to biological functions or reflexes shared by all humans: belching, breathing, digestion, shivering, hunger, vision, sneezing, hearing, sleep, smell (which partly overlap with the so-called “common symptoms” of the preface to book 2). Through its use, the author in each instance makes himself and his readers part of the human subjects whose physiological functions are under investigation, and is thus able to affirm the universal applicability of his observations and theories. In 1.7 and 2.122, next, the use of the first person plural points to the author’s membership in a community of physicians who follow certain regimens in order to cure their patients or keep them healthy (namely, bathing and providing nourishment at the appropriate time). In this way, they place emphasis on his medical expertise and specialist knowledge. 2.34 and 2.38 use the first-person plural in order to discuss practices (namely, digging for fresh water on the shore and carrying weights on shoulders, respectively) that, albeit involving manual labour (and thus associated with the lower ranks of society), nevertheless fall within the wider realm of life experience which the author shares with his readers. In this way, they put the author’s contact with and keen observation of the world of practical affairs to the fore, and suggest his theoretical observations are rooted in (and perhaps also applicable to) the practical sphere. 31 Last but not least, the use of the first-person plural in 1.17 and 3.31 is akin to the use of the first-person singular in the examples under Table A, in that the author employs it in order to cross-refer to points he made earlier, or in order to introduce new points or draw emphasis to his conclusions. The variation is however significant, insofar as it invites the reader to follow the author in these textual operations and intimately involves him in the logical course of the argument. 32

Table C. References to opinions, viewpoints or methods of others

| 1.8 | Why, in the case of hectic fevers, do doctors give water (ὕδωρ παρέχουσιν οἱ ἰατροί) shortly before food? |

32 Cf. Mattern (2008: 138-40), on the alternation between ‘I’ and ‘we’ statements in Galen. See also Oikonomopoulou (2013b); Lehoux (2017).
1.17 The general public (ὁ πολὺς δήμος) [see above].

2.58 Why do the white marks which some people call “lovers” and others “lies” (ὁ καλοῦσιν οἱ μὲν ἐραστάς, οἱ δὲ ψεύδη) not occur in the toenails in the same way that they do in the fingernails?

2.74 As they say also (λέγουσιν) that the Illyrians who are scalped in battles and die have bushy heads within a few days […]

2.88 […] some say Dionysus and others Zonysus, and some Heragores and some Heragoras. (ὁδὲ οἱ μὲν Διόνυσον οἱ δὲ Ζόνυσον, καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἡραγόρην οἱ δ’ Ἡραγόραν.)

2.123 Why does everyone speak about (λέγουσι µὲν πάντες) eating or drinking with pleasure, and the rich pride themselves on it (σεµινόνται δὲ οἱ πλούσιοι), but not also in the case of evacuations?

3.26 And for this reason some say (ἔνιοι φασιν) that the wax-ointment is the best of doctors’ (τῶν ἱατρῶν) discoveries.

3.34 […] and for this reason doctors use it [sc. goat’s suet] most (οἱ ἱατροὶ […] χρῶνται μάλιστα) as an emollient.

In most cases, the opinions of the general public are cited, in order to track common linguistic usage or linguistic variation (2.88), comment on cultural practice or refer to commonly held views and opinions (in a way that, as we saw in the case of problems 1.17 and 3.2, serves to differentiate them from or juxtapose them to the specialist’s point of view). The opinions of other doctors (perhaps from rival schools) are never cited by way of reinforcing points or engaging in doctrinal polemics. In three instances (1.8, 3.26, 3.34) mention is made of ‘the doctors’ in general, in a way that might suggest that the author seeks to differentiate himself from medical specialists and their discoveries or prescribed regimens (cf. 1.7 and 2.122 above): if so (and this is not simply a summary reference to his own profession), he could alternatively be posing as a natural scientist who is obviously familiar with medical practice, but perhaps not necessarily a practicing doctor himself.

Literary quotation and doxography constitute special cases of the author referring to the opinions of others (not included in the table above). Both have a very limited presence: the collection presents us with quotations from Homer (2.145, 3.34), an unidentified comic poet (2.78), Empedocles (2.102) and Hippocrates (1. Preface, 1.4), and also cites the opinions of Heraclitus (2.42) Aristotle (3.11, Usener Appendix 46) and an author named Alcimachus, who wrote on Celtic customs (2.181). In all cases, the invocation of poetic and scientific authorities invests the author’s scientific views with a veneer of authority or, as in the case of the Theognis-quotation in problem 1.17, illustrate them in a way that makes them accessible

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33 Cf. the frequent engagement with the opinions of adversaries in other imperial encyclopaedic and medical texts: see esp. Fögen (2013), on Pliny the Elder.
to non-specialist readers. As far as scientific authorities in particular are concerned, quoting from their works or citing their opinions joins the author and his readers in a dialogue with scientific views of the past, towards the aim of appraising them from a fresh perspective. Also not included in the tables above are the many instances in which the authors of individual problems refer to patients, women, old men, children, slaves, the rich, and foreigners, as case studies distinct from themselves, on the basis of whose physiological and anatomical characteristics or illnesses they formulate their scientific theories and offer scientific explanations. Such a colourful variety of human subjects is a testament to the vast scope of the collection, transcending limits of gender, social class or culture. Discussions of foreign peoples and locations (found only in the second and third books) are especially noteworthy, as instances in which the author assumes the garb of the ethnographer. Thus, Ethiopians (2.66, 2.73) are mentioned in the context of discussing curly hair and are contrasted to Scythians, who have straight hair (2.73). The remainder of ethnographic information or references to foreign places concern animals: mention is made of the absence of asses in Scythia (2.173), the habits of wild animals in Libya (2.130), the Celts’ mistaken beliefs about mules (2.181), and the Carthaginians’ term for the boar’s tusk (2.158). Further, they are mentioned in connection to various substances: Indian sugarcane and Lebanese, Pontic and Egyptian varieties of honey (1.2), the Phrygians’ bad taste in wine (2.156), the Hyrcanian lake’s cleansing properties (3.45), the Dead Sea’s density (3.49). As an isolated case, the Thracians (most likely meaning Thracian slaves) are also mentioned, as people who make mistakes in speech when they grow old (3.44). Interest in ethnography is well-attested in ancient medical literature (especially the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*; the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* also contains ethnographic information), and the authors of books 2 and 3 may well have also been influenced by paradoxographical writing, which was well-established as a genre by the imperial era. But the presence of knowledge of this sort within the *Supplementary Problems* is also especially revealing of its imperial outlook, bringing the collection’s authors and their readers into contact with a wider world full of exotic marvels, rich in supply of foreign products, and cosmopolitan, in terms of its contact with foreign cultures.

### Table D. Apostrophes to the reader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Preface</th>
<th>Hippocrates’ addressee in the paraphrase of <em>Aphorisms</em> 1.1. [see above]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>You should know (γίνωσκε γὰρ) that [the egg] is made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 On poetic discourse in ancient scientific writing, see Althoff (2012); Coxhead (2012); Rosen (2013); Doxiadis – Silaros (2013); Taub (2017: 22-49).
35 On the social and intellectual dynamics that underpin the process of becoming an authority in the ancient world, see esp. Meeusen (2016b), as well as the other studies in Boodts – Leemans – Meijns (2016).
36 Cf. Mattern (2008: 140-58), on Galen’s relationship to his patients.
38 On paradoxographical elements in imperial *problemata*-collections, see Meeusen (2019).
of the four elements; [...] And, if you will allow me to say it (καὶ εἰ μοι συγχωροίης εἰπεῖν), [the egg] seems to resemble the universe.

1.17 Hear (ἀκούε). [see above]

The very few apostrophes to the reader occur in the first book, in lengthy problems that exhibit rhetorical elaboration. They place the reader in a position whereby he is about to be instructed on something novel or important (hence the choice of imperatives such as γίνωσκε or ἀκούε: the latter, as we already saw, also evokes an oral context of transmission). When they are used in conjunction with the first-person singular, they create a virtual dialogue between author and reader-addressee, in which the author anticipates the objections or reaction of an imagined interlocutor – as in the case of problem 1.12, where the author appeals to his reader’s licence (εἰ μοι συγχωροίης εἰπεῖν), in view of the fact that he is about to assimilate the egg to the universe, and thus invest it with cosmic connotations.39

The sparse use of verbal adjectives (ῥητέον: 2.22, ληπτέον: 2.139), and impersonal phrases (νῦν λεχθήσεται: 4.81, ὥσπερ εἴρηται: 4.139) are also integral to the dialogue the authors conduct with their readers in the Supplementary Problems, in that they alert the latter to key aspects of argumentative method and procedure, cross-reference previous parts of a problem, or anticipate the topic that will follow. It is in such instances in particular that the pedagogical aim that underpins many of the problems in the collection can be observed in practice, guiding the reader through the various problems’ contents.

This overview of the material has hopefully allowed us to disentangle the different identities assumed by the authors of the Supplementary Problems, towards penetrating into its uneven texture and richness. As expected, the normative authorial subject is in all cases male, educated, Greek, and (given the topics) a scientist. But there is significant variation in terms of the authors’ intellectual self-positioning and cultural outlook, which may be indicative of different contexts of composition, as well as different intended audiences. For starters, it has already become clear that the collection incorporates influences from different philosophical traditions (Peripatetic, Stoic or Platonist), which are manifest in different problems, which can, in turn, be linked to the activity and interests of different intellectual communities.40

Secondly, it is tempting to associate problems (such as 1.17) in which the author ventures into allegorical interpretations of myths, or engages in dialogue with the literary tradition with contexts of epideictic display (such as oral performance or symposia). Further, there is a marked difference in register and outlook between problems which enrich their scientific enquiries with remarks on Greek lexical variety and difference or observations pertaining to Greek cultural practice and problems which contain ethnographic information. In the former, the author poses as a cultural insider who infuses his scientific investigations with cultural insight. In the latter, the author poses as a well-travelled physician, in the style of Hippocratic doctors, or as a collector of ethnographic curiosities, resembling Herodotus or the imperial

39 See Kapetanaki – Sharples (2006: 105 n. 184), on the probable Stoic or Platonic roots of this association. Cf. Plu., Quaest. conv. 2.3.
40 Kapetanaki – Sharples (2006: 1-28) discuss the intellectual background of most enquiries.
5. Conclusions: complexities and problems

Most of the recent scholarship on authorial voice and authority in ancient scientific writing has so far steered clear of ancient problemata-collections, no doubt because of their heterogeneity and the interpretative difficulties that present themselves, when reductive readings of their contents are attempted. What I hope has become clear from the observations that have been offered in the course of this chapter is that the co-existence of multiple authorial identities (and, consequently, multiple possibilities of context and readership) in imperial problemata-collections like the Supplementary Problems need not be a prohibiting factor in our accessing their dialogue with key cultural concerns of their time. On the contrary, it would do justice to the colourful content of these writings if more systematic work could be devoted to the ways in which medicine and natural science pose within their contents both as specialist knowledge and as culturally prized discourse.

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Primary Sources


Secondary Sources

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paradoxographers. Given the popularity of cultural aetiology and ethnographic discourse in the imperial era, the presence of such themes within the Supplementary Problems may well seek to cater to the expectations and tastes of diverse imperial audiences or readers (not exclusively pupils of medicine). The same may well be true of the considerable proportion of problems where the author takes everyday life and its wide range of economic activities (such as animal breeding, farming, sailing, the winds and seasons) as a starting-point for his enquiries, thus posing as a scientist whose medical-naturalist point of view encompasses all aspects of life (even the most mundane), and who is, for precisely this reason, able to communicate knowledge effectively to readers of differing social or economic backgrounds.


