
Pseudo-Aristoteles (Pseudo-Alexander), Supplementa Problematorum: A New Edition of the Greek Text with Introduction and Annotated Translation edited by S. Kapetanaki and R. W. Sharples

Peripatoi 20. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006. Pp. 301. ISBN 978-3-11-019140-0. Cloth €82.24

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The *problemata* edited in this volume are traditionally known as *Problemata inedita*. They were first published with this title in 1857 by Bussemaker, who added them to his edition of the *Problemata*.¹ Sophia Kapetanaki and Bob Sharples think that it is anachronistic to continue to refer to these *problemata* as ‘unpublished.’ Instead, they suggest calling them *Supplementary Problems (Supplementa problematorum)*. This title avoids any anachronism and at the same time conveys the message that these *problemata* are best understood as an addition or a supplement to the main corpus of Aristotelian problems.

Although Bussemaker included the *Problemata inedita* in an edition of Aristotle, he alerted the reader that his Greek manuscripts were divided in attributing the *problemata* to Aristotle and to Alexander of Aphrodisias. The connection with Alexander is reflected in the indirect tradition as well. Some (but not all) of these *problemata* are transmitted in the Latin translations of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *Problemata* produced by Giorgio Valla (1488)² and Theodore

¹ Both the *Problemata* (38 books) and the *Problemata inedita* (3 books) edited by Bussemaker can be found in the Didot edition of Aristotle [see [Dübner, Bussemaker, and Heitz 1848–1869](#), vol. 4].

² Alexander Aphrodisiensis, *Problemata* 2.2–62 and 5.1–56 with #61566; *Problemata inedita* 2.60–124 and 2.126–186. I have used a copy of the 1488 edition available for consultation in the Osler Library at McGill University. The Valla translation was reprinted in 1501. Kapetanaki and Sharples have used this reprint, which has book 5 renumbered as book 3.

Gaza (1453).³ Bussemaker did not make much of the connection with Alexander. In fact, he concluded his *praefatio* with a distinction between Aristotelian *problemata* and Alexandrian *problemata* [xviii–xix]. Only two years later, in 1859, the connection with Alexander was given a completely different interpretation by Usener. On the basis of transcripts of the manuscripts entrusted to him by Brandis, Usener produced an edition of the first two books of these *problemata* in which he argued that these two books were a continuation of two extant books of medical puzzles and physical problems attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias. He made this connection explicit by speaking of Alexander’s *Problemata* 3 and 4 [Usener 1859]. Note that an edition of Alexander’s *Problemata* 1 and 2—always attributed to Alexander and never to Aristotle—had already been published by Ideler [1841–1842, 1.3–80]. According to Usener, Ideler’s books 1 and 2 plus Usener’s books 3 and 4 (= Bussemaker’s books 1–2) constituted a collection of medical puzzles and physical problems circulating under the name of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

This whole question is revisited by Kapetanaki and Sharples. Their edition not only offers a new and improved text of the *Supplementary Problems*, it also provides a detailed discussion of their textual tradition, including the complicated transmission of books 1 and 2 (Bussemaker’s 1–2 = Usener’s 3–4). Their edition is based on the collation of 32 Greek manuscripts⁴ and a careful study of the indirect tradition. The indirect tradition includes not only the Latin translations by Valla and Gaza of the *problemata* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, but also the eighth century collection of Latin problems attributed to Aristotle and known as *Problemata Bambergensia*,⁵ and a paraphrase by Michael Psellus (1018–1097) drawing on the first two books of our *problemata* plus the two books

³ Alexander Aphrodisiensis, *Problemata* 2.78–135 = *Problemata inedita* 1 and 2.1–38. The Gaza translation can be found in the Juntine edition of Aristotle and Averroes [Giunta 1562–1574, 7.169–204.

⁴ Bussemaker based his edition of the *Problemata inedita* on six Greek mss plus the Latin translations of Valla and Gaza. Usener based his edition of Alexander’s *Problemata* 3 and 4 on 14 Greek mss plus the Latin translations of Valla and Gaza.

⁵ This collection is also known as *Problemata vetustissima*. For the *editio princeps*, see Rose 1863, 665–676.

of *problemata* unanimously attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias (= Ideler's 1 and 2).⁶

Regarding the attribution of the first two books of the *Supplementary Problems*, Kapetanaki and Sharples have come to the conclusion that 'it cannot be demonstrated that the attribution of books 1 and 2 to Aristotle is secondary and that to Alexander primary' [16]. While there is clear evidence that these books were united into a single collection and were circulating under the name of Alexander of Aphrodisias, their attribution to Aristotle is equally well attested. But there is no reason to suppose, I hasten to add, that these *problemata* are the work of either Aristotle or Alexander. According to Kapetanaki and Sharples, their association with Alexander is no closer and no stronger than their connection with Aristotle. It may well be that 'we are simply dealing with just one more example of the tendency for texts to be ascribed to famous individuals' [27].

Although the processes that led to the formation, arrangement, and even rearrangement of the material that ended up in the *Supplementary Problems* cannot be fully reconstructed, Kapetanaki and Sharples help us to appreciate fully the complexity of these processes. In order to see this, it will be useful to take the second book of the *Supplementary Problems* as a case study. A short preface not only introduces the second part of the book [2.39–192] but also separates it from the first part [2.1–38]. This preface can be taken—and indeed was taken by Bussemaker and Usener—as evidence of a change of source. But it is clear that the short preface, which announces the study of the common symptoms—defined in the preface as the symptoms that can occur at all ages, for instance dizziness—does not prepare the reader for the final zoological section [2.127–192]. It is telling that in a 15th century manuscript [Modena, MS gr. Alpha V7.17 (= K)] this section is introduced with the title *Various Problems and Solutions by the Same Author concerning the Four-Footed Animals, Book 5*.⁷ The author in question is to be understood as Alexander of Aphrodisias and 'Book 5' is to be taken as an indication that, in this branch of the tradition, the zoological section was

⁶ The reader will find Psellus' paraphrase in [Duffy and O'Meara 1989–1992](#), 1.241–283.

⁷ Valla, who used this manuscript as a source for his translation of Alexander's *Problemata*, has the title *Doubts and Solutions about Four-Footed Animals*.

treated as a separate book. Note also that this book belonged to a compilation of *problemata* consisting of *at least* five books.⁸ It turns out, however, that one of the *problemata* in this section [2.156] is attributed to ‘Aristotle’s *aporemata*’ in an Oxyrhynchus papyrus of the second century AD [P. Oxy. 2744]. It is certainly significant that this problem existed in the second century AD (or even earlier); but it is even more significant that it existed as part of a collection of *problemata* (or *aporemata*),⁹ and that this collection was attributed to Aristotle as early as the second century AD. We cannot rule out that this ‘Aristotle’ collection was subsequently incorporated into an ‘Alexander’ collection. But it is clear that other sections of our book circulated as (parts of) ‘Aristotle’ collections. For one, section 2.1–38 certainly circulated under the name of Aristotle, since a few of these *problemata* can be found, often in an abbreviated form, in the *Problemata Bambergensia* as well as in the Arabic tradition.¹⁰

This leads to the question of the possible relation between the *Supplementary Problems* and the *Problems* attributed to Aristotle. Kapetanaki and Sharples note that certain sections of the second book of the *Supplementary Problems* have significant parallels with the Aristotelian *Problems*.¹¹ They explain this overlap by assuming that our material was at least in part excerpted from the Aristotelian *Problems* [8–9]. But they also warn the reader that this explanation cannot be applied to the sections of *Supplementary Problems* that have few or no points of contact with the Aristotelian *Problems* (or, for that matter, with the problems unanimously attributed to Alexander). In fact, they argue that the *problemata* that ended up in our

⁸ I stress ‘at least’ because only three books from this collection can be found in this manuscript (books 1, 2, and 5).

⁹ Both ‘puzzles’ (*aporemata*) and ‘problems’ (*problemata*) are acceptable titles for a collection of problems. For example, the first book of the *Supplementary Problems* is entitled ‘Natural Puzzles and Medical Problems, Selections’.

¹⁰ For the Arabic tradition of the *Supplementary Problems* (still described as *Problemata inedita*), see [Flius 2006](#). Interestingly enough, *Supplementary Problems* 2.1–38 is the only section of the *Supplementary Problems* that was known in the Arabic world.

¹¹ *Supplementary Problems* 2.39–53 (dizziness), 2.83–97 (voice and hearing), 2.98–104 (smell).

collection cannot be explained solely on the basis of a process of selection from previous sets of problems. Rather, we have to allow for ‘the composition of new [sets of] problems . . . and for the development of collections [of problems] by a process of accretion rather than selection’ [11].

The *Supplementary Problems* are not just a collection of *problemata*. The first book begins with a very interesting prologue in which Hippocrates is introduced as a helper that a provident god sent to the human race at a time when it was being destroyed by a succession of diseases. It is not obvious how this prologue is connected to the *Supplementary Problems*. In fact, it is not clear that it was originally written to introduce the first two books (or the first book) of the *Supplementary Problems*.¹² Bussemaker did not include this prologue in his edition of the *Problemata inedita*; but Usener included it in his edition of Alexander’s *Problemata* 3 and 4. However, Usener printed the text in square brackets because he thought that this prologue was originally written for a commentary on the *Aphorisms* of Hippocrates. Flashar thinks that our text could have been written as an introduction to our *problemata*. Furthermore, he argues that the language of our prologue betrays Stoic influence and suggests that this text could provide evidence, alongside works such as the Aristotelian *De mundo*, of a Stoic presence in the Peripatetic tradition [see Flashar 1962a and 1962b, 363]. Kapetanaki and Sharples print the prologue in their edition of the *Supplementary Problems*. However, they refrain from telling us whether this text was written for our *problemata*. Here we reach, presumably, the

¹² This prologue cannot be taken to introduce the third book. While books 1 and 2 circulated widely under the name of Aristotle or Alexander—and even under the name of Aristotle *and* Alexander—book 3 is found in only one manuscript [Paris, BN, ancient gr. 2047A (= A)]. Moreover, although this manuscript transmits book 3 along with books 1 and 2, the latter are attributed to Alexander; whereas the former is presented as a separate collection and its *problemata* are not attributed to any specific author. One may even raise the question whether this book should be edited together with books 1 and 2. Kapetanaki and Sharples address this question in their introduction. They acknowledge the lack of connection but tell us that they have decided to include the compilation ‘influenced by the similarity in manner between 3.1–45 and 2.39–192 and by the presence in 3.9–29 of a possible Theophrastean connection’ [6].

limits of what can be confidently said on the basis of the information in our possession.

Kapetanaki and Sharples print the Greek text of the *Supplementary Problems* alongside an English translation and copious footnotes. The footnotes contain detailed information about parallel texts not only in the extant corpus of *problemata* but also in Aristotle, Theophrastus, and the ancient medical tradition. This information suggests that, while the driving force behind the *Supplementary Problems* may have been intellectual curiosity, this curiosity was guided, and indeed controlled, by general principles of natural philosophy and medical knowledge. The theoretical framework of the *Supplementary Problems* is of a Peripatetic character. The reader will find references in the footnotes not only to Aristotle's zoological works (*Historia animalium*, *De partibus animalium*, *De incessu animalium*, and *De generatione animalium*) but also to Theophrastus. The section on dizziness draws on the *De vertigine* by Theophrastus. But Kapetanaki and Sharples suspect that more Theophrastean material from works that we no longer possess may be present in the *Supplementary Problems*.¹³

By focusing on the *Supplementary Problems*, Kapetanaki and Sharples have given us a model for any future study of the history of a philosophical genre which originated in the Peripatetic tradition, and indeed with Aristotle, but which remained popular well beyond the boundaries of antiquity. Scholars working on the *fortuna* of this genre in antiquity and beyond will find this very fine book of great help in the context of their own research.

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¹³ For a discussion of the possible Theophrastean origins of the section of nails and hair [2.54–82], excretion and purgation [2.105–126] and wine and olive-oil [3.9–29], I refer the reader to [Sharples 2004](#).

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