

## Medicine and Sophistry in Hippolytus' *Refutatio*\*

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### ABSTRACT

The *Refutatio* attributed to Hippolytus contains numerous signs that Christians of the second and early third centuries were aware of the public displays performed by sophists and doctors. Hippolytus himself demonstrates his familiarity with the tropes of sophistic performance by depicting heretics, particularly his nemesis Callistus, as if they were just as inconsistent and devious as extemporizing sophists. Hippolytus also provides indications that some groups of heretics, particularly the Peratae, had active and technical interests in the mechanics of human anatomy and physiology, and that these groups are likely to have witnessed the public demonstrations and dissections commonly performed by doctors in the second century.

The *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* attributed to Hippolytus displays the engagement of its author with the diverse intellectual and scholarly life of Rome in the first half of the third century.<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus' major concern in the work is to establish that the Christians he deems heretical have derived their doctrines from non-Christian sources, thus leading him to portray Christian heretics as plagiarists and crypto-pagans.<sup>2</sup> Greek philosophy, Hippolytus

\* All unattributed references are to the *Refutatio*. For the Greek text of the *Refutatio*, I use the edition of Miroslav Marcovich (ed.), *Hippolytus: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, Patristische Texte und Studien 25 (Berlin and New York, 1986), which contains valuable indices. I have also checked Marcovich's text against that of Paul Wendland, *Hippolytus Werke, dritter Band: Refutatio omnium haeresium*, GCS 26 (Leipzig, 1916), which is rather more conservatively edited.

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of convenience, I refer to the author of the *Refutatio* as 'Hippolytus', though there remains debate about the attribution of this and the many other works in the Hippolytan corpus. What matters for this paper is that the *Refutatio* was written by an author who lived at Rome in the first half of the third century, as is established by his statement that he was a contemporary of the bishop Callistus (r. 217-222): IX 11.4. On the author of the *Refutatio* and his other works, see now Emanuele Castelli, 'The Author of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* and the Attribution of the *De universo* to Flavius Josephus', in Gabriella Aragione and Enrico Norelli (eds), *Des évêques, des écoles et des hérétiques. Actes du colloque international sur la «Réfutation de toutes les hérésies»*, Genève, 13-14 juin 2008 (Prahins, 2011), 219-31. My thanks to Dr. Castelli for providing me with an offprint of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Heretics are characterized as crypto-pagans at the beginning of the work (I proem.1), and periodically throughout. The work's beginning also contains the first of several references to heretics as plagiarists: I proem.11. Other references to heretics as crypto-pagans and plagiarists are collected in the valuable discussion of Daniel A. Bertrand, 'La notion d'apocryphe dans l'argumentation de la *Réfutation de toutes les hérésies*', in Simon Claude Mimouni (ed.),

alleges, is the major source for heretical doctrines, but he also claims that heretics have taken inspiration from other fields of study, such as magic and astrology.<sup>3</sup> At minimum, the arguments employed by Hippolytus demonstrate that he read widely, even if much of what he read was digested in the form of handbooks, rather than the original works of the Greek authors he cites.<sup>4</sup>

Hippolytus also provides indications that he was familiar with other elements of Roman intellectual life besides what could be found in books, as befits an author who wished to display himself as a serious scholar.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Hippolytus shows an awareness of the public performances associated with the flourishing sophistic movement, which are best known from the works of Philostratus, who also spent time at Rome in the early third century.<sup>6</sup> Hippolytus even seems familiar with the public demonstrations conducted by doctors, which are best known from the works of Galen, another of his contemporaries at Rome.<sup>7</sup>

Hippolytus' awareness of the public performances of sophists and doctors is apparent especially from his employment of several key words and thematic elements in his attacks against heretics. These key words and thematic elements

*Apocryphité: histoire d'un concept transversal aux religions du livre: en hommage à Pierre Geoltrain*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses 113 (Turnhout, 2002), 131-40.

<sup>3</sup> Magic as a source for heresy is reviewed at length in IV 28-42. See also James A. Kelhofer, "'Hippolytus" and Magic. An Examination of *Elenchos* IV 28-42 and Related Passages in Light of the Papyri Graecae Magicae', *ZAC* 11 (2007), 517-48. Astrology is the subject of Hippolytus' critical comments in V 1-27. For a discussion of astrology in the *Refutatio*, see Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, 'I rischi dell'Hellenismòs: astrologia ed eresia nella *Refutatio omnium haeresium*', in G. Aragione and E. Norelli (eds), *Des évêques* (2011), 189-217.

<sup>4</sup> The suggestion that Hippolytus was an original reporter and researcher who used sources other than handbooks has been made by Catherine Osborne, *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy: Hippolytus of Rome and the Presocratics* (Ithaca, 1987), esp. 14 and 39. The argument for Hippolytus' originality has received mixed reviews. For a negative judgment, note, for instance, Jonathan Barnes, 'The Presocratics in Context', *Phronesis* 33 (1988), 327-44, 336. But now see Abraham P. Bos, 'Basilides of Alexandria disqualified as not a Christian but an Aristotelian by the author of the *Elenchos*', in G. Aragione and E. Norelli (eds), *Des évêques* (2011), 103-18, 115, for the suggestion that Hippolytus and Alexander of Aphrodisias can both be viewed as scholars who offered their own idiosyncratic interpretations of Aristotle. On Hippolytus' use of handbooks, see Jaap Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context: Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 56 (Leiden and New York, 1992), esp. 151.

<sup>5</sup> On Hippolytus' scholarly pretensions and self-presentation, see Manlio Simonetti, 'Per un profilo dell'autore dell'*Elenchos*', in G. Aragione and E. Norelli (eds), *Des évêques* (2011), 257-73, 261 and 272; Winrich Löhr, 'The Continuing Construction of Heresy: Hippolyt's [sic] *Refutatio* in Context', in G. Aragione and E. Norelli (eds), *Des évêques* (2011), 25-42, 40; Clemens Scholten, 'Autor, Anliegen und Publikum der *Refutatio*', in G. Aragione and E. Norelli (eds), *Des évêques* (2011), 135-66, 166.

<sup>6</sup> See Ewen Bowie, 'Philostratus: The Life of a Sophist', in Ewen Bowie and Jaś Elsner (eds), *Philostratus, Greek Culture in the Roman World* (Cambridge and New York, 2009), 19-30, 20.

<sup>7</sup> The fundamental account of Galen's life is now that of Véronique Boudon-Millot (ed.), *Galien, tome 1: Introduction générale, Sur l'ordre de ses propres livres, Sur ses propres livres, Que l'excellent médecin est aussi philosophe* (Paris, 2007), vii-xc.

are common to both the medical demonstrations of Galen and to the performances of sophists, as has been demonstrated in an important article by Heinrich von Staden.<sup>8</sup> The vocabulary of display is fundamental to both Galen and to Philostratus, and is reflected in their repeated use of words like ἐπίδειξις and ἐπίδεικνυμι.<sup>9</sup> Both also emphasize the importance of improvised speech in performances, frequently employing the verb σχεδιάζω, with or without the prefix αὐτο-.<sup>10</sup> The two authors similarly focus much attention on the audience's response to a performance, and they often use vocabulary indicative of astonishment and marveling: words like θαῦμα, θαυμάζω, and ἐκπλήσσω.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Galen and Philostratus both have a keen sense of the difference between public and private settings for performances and other types of speech, a difference they express with the words δημοσίᾳ and ἰδίᾳ.<sup>12</sup>

Hippolytus likewise employs the vocabulary of display, improvisation, astonishment, and marveling, and he even makes the distinction between private and public settings for speech, all signs that he is attuned to the epideictic culture that characterized so much of Greek intellectual life in the second and early third centuries. Certainly, there is no difficulty in imagining that Hippolytus would have been exposed to the public performances of sophists and doctors in Rome. The city was a major destination both for doctors and for sophists, and there was broad interest in their performances even among people who were not part of the city's intellectual elite.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, Hippolytus

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich von Staden, 'Galen and the "Second Sophistic"', in Richard Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle and After*, BICS Supplement 68 (London, 1997), 33-55. This article is a more technical version of 'Anatomy as Rhetoric: Galen on Dissection and Persuasion', *JHM* 50 (1995), 47-66. For the phenomenon of doctors who also possessed sophistic talents, so-called iatrosophists, see now Glen W. Bowersock, 'Iatrosophists', in Lavinia Galli Milić and Nicole Hecquet-Noti (eds), *Historiae Augustae: colloquium Genevense in honorem F. Paschoud septuagenarii. Les traditions historiographiques de l'Antiquité tardive: idéologie, propagande, fiction, réalité*, *Historiae Augustae colloquia*, Nova series 11 (Bari, 2010), 83-91.

<sup>9</sup> H. von Staden, 'Galen' (1997), 37-9, with multiple references to the works of Galen.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 40-2, with references to both Galen and Philostratus.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 47-51, with references in 51 n. 73.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 44-6, with references to the public/private distinction in Galen. In the case of Philostratus, note especially *Lives of the Sophists*, 2.9 (583), which concerns the habit of Aelius Aristides to practice speaking extemporaneously 'in private (ἰδίᾳ)' while secluded in a room.

<sup>13</sup> Rome, along with Athens, Ephesus, Pergamum, and Smyrna, is one of the major centers of sophistic activity in the period treated by Philostratus. See Ewen Bowie, 'The Geography of the Second Sophistic: Cultural Variations', in Barbara E. Borg (ed.), *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic* (Berlin and New York, 2004), 65-83, 68. For some sense of the size and composition of the audiences who attended sophistic performances at Rome, note especially Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, 1.8 (491) and 2.10 (589). Both passages describe how even people who were ignorant of Greek attended sophistic performances at Rome, preferring them to more common entertainers such as dancers. In the case of doctors, Rome had been a major destination since the late second century BCE. See Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London and New York, 2004), esp. 167-71. Scattered comments about the large size and diverse composition of the audiences for medical demonstrations come throughout Galen's large corpus of works, particularly in his treatises *On Prognosis* (e.g. 3.3 [14.614 Kühn]), and *On Anatomical Procedures*

makes no explicit references to the activities of any contemporary sophists or doctors,<sup>14</sup> but his silence in this regard is less significant than his evident familiarity with the forms that their public displays took, and with the ways in which an audience might be expected to respond to their performances.

Hippolytus exploits his familiarity with contemporary epideictic culture as part of his larger attempt to depict heretics as crypto-pagans. He casts himself as an anti-sophist, concerned both with revealing the tricks employed by heretics to spread their errors, but also with displaying the true Christian doctrine. Thus he says that ‘the artificial sophisms (σοφίσματα) of error will be revealed as improvable when the definition of truth is displayed (ἐπιδειχθῆ)’ (X 5.1). Hippolytus likens heretics to men who ‘display a strange marvel (ξένον θαῦμα ἐνδεικνύμενοι)’ (IV 46.2), and he wants no one to be taken in and ‘astonished (καταπλαγείζ)’ by the sorts of ‘marvels (θαύμασι)’ that they exhibit (IV 46.5). Heretics likewise use their talent for improvised speech to astonish their audiences, thereby convincing them of the truth of false doctrines and beliefs. Christians are consequently led astray by the empty showmanship of heretics, who are no better than sophists and charlatans.

Hippolytus’ sophisticated heretic *par excellence* is his nemesis Callistus, who is branded as a devious and inconsistent improviser. Hippolytus was a first-hand observer of Callistus at Rome in the late second and early third centuries, and he is consequently able to provide details about Callistus as a speaker that are absent from his accounts of other heretics. Hippolytus even differentiates between instances of Callistus speaking in private and in public settings. Callistus, for instance, would induce Zephyrinus, his predecessor as bishop, to give voice to controversial statements ‘in public (δημοσίᾳ)’, which led to constant disturbances among the Christians of Rome (IX 11.3). After Zephyrinus’ death, Callistus accused Hippolytus and his party ‘in public (δημοσίᾳ)’ of being ditheists (IX 12.16). The public accusation of ditheism and the statements of Zephyrinus presumably took place at a meeting between members of Rome’s different Christian communities, as Allen Brent has suggested.<sup>15</sup> Apart from speaking in public settings, Callistus also worked ‘in private (κατ’ ἰδίαν)’,

(e.g. 7.16 [Kühn 2.642, 646]). See also Maud W. Gleason, ‘Shock and Awe: The Performance Dimensions of Galen’s Anatomy Demonstrations’, in Christopher Gill, Tim Whitmarsh and John Wilkins (eds), *Galen and the World of Knowledge*, Greek Culture in the Roman World (Cambridge and New York, 2009), 85-114, 89, for the commonness of informal medical competitions which were witnessed by interested crowds.

<sup>14</sup> Hippolytus only makes a single reference to sophists, and this is explicitly to the ancient sophists of the classical period: VIII 11.2. Hippolytus’ most intriguing reference to doctors comes in his criticism of the calculations made by astrologists on the basis of a person’s time of conception: IV 3.7. But this section is cribbed almost verbatim from Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus mathematicos*, 5.57), so it provides little reflection on the extent of Hippolytus’ engagement with contemporary doctors.

<sup>15</sup> Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (Leiden, 1995), 429.

presumably within the confines of a single church, school, or home, to deceive different groups of Christians into thinking that he shared their doctrines, whether they were in Hippolytus' estimation true believers, or followers of Sabellius (IX 11.1). Hippolytus can accordingly liken Callistus to a sophist: he 'improvis[es] (σχεδιάζων) blasphemies wildly, only so that he may seem to speak according to the truth. Sometimes he falls into the doctrine of Sabellius and at other times he is unashamed of the doctrine of Theodotus' (IX 12.19). Callistus thus appears less as a Christian teacher and theologian, and more as an inconsistent sophist, improvising an argument first in favor of one side of a position, and then switching sides and defending the opposite position.

Callistus also is depicted like a sophist when Hippolytus makes derisive reference to the crowds that flocked to his school. A large and appreciative audience is of course a mark of a successful sophist,<sup>16</sup> but Hippolytus offers a subversive account of Callistus' well-attended school, emphasizing its laxness on the issue of sensual pleasures. 'The pupils of Callistus', Hippolytus says, 'take pleasure (ἡσθέντες) in his doctrines, and persist with him, making a mockery of themselves and of many others. Crowds (ὄχλοι) of them flood to his school, multiplying [the number of] his pupils, who pride themselves on the crowds (ὄχλοις) flooding to the school on account of the pleasures (ἡδονάς) which Christ did not allow' (IX 12.23-4). In Hippolytus' reckoning, the crowds that Callistus attracted to his school made him more like a performing sophist than a genuine Christian.

Hippolytus' awareness of the activities and performances of contemporary sophists is surely demonstrated by his unflattering portrayal of Callistus as an extemporaneous speaker who speaks in both public and private settings to large audiences. His application of the verb *σχεδιάζω* to other heretics provides further confirmation of his awareness.<sup>17</sup> In Hippolytus' portrayal, heretics are much like sophists because of their tendency to speak without adequate thought or preparation in advance. The hastiness and inconsistency of heretics brands them as sophists, rather than as genuine Christians.

Hippolytus also displays some familiarity with the performances of doctors, offering tantalizing hints that Christians formed part of their astonished audiences. At minimum, Hippolytus provides compelling evidence that some Christians had active and technical interests in human anatomy and physiology, which they may well have developed and indulged by witnessing public medical demonstrations.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, 1.21 (518), on the crowds of students that the sophist Scopelian attracted to Smyrna.

<sup>17</sup> Other uses of the verb *σχεδιάζω*: IV 13.1; IV 51.9; V 9.7; V 10.1.

<sup>18</sup> Note Galen's suggestion to his readers that they should also 'make themselves eyewitnesses of dissections (ἀνατομῶν)', besides simply reading his book: *On Anatomical Procedures* 4.6 (Kühn 2.449).

Hippolytus' clearest allusion to a medical demonstration is contained in his account of a rather mysterious heretical group called the Peratae,<sup>19</sup> who employ an impressively technical knowledge of the brain's anatomy and physiology as part of their cosmological speculations. Like many heretical groups, the Peratae assign significance to the number seven, and Hippolytus asserts that they 'attempt to contrive the hebdomads from the medical art, having been astonished (ἐκπλαγέντες) at the dissection (ἀνατομῆ) of the brain' (IV 51.10). The Peratae, in other words, responded to a dissection of the brain in the same way that Galen's audience would when he was vivisectioning an animal.<sup>20</sup> Hippolytus takes for granted the possibility that a dissection of the brain would be witnessed by an astonished audience, a likely sign that he at least was familiar with the phenomenon of public medical demonstrations.

The Peratae too seem to have been familiar with medical demonstrations, and some of their members even seem to have actually witnessed a brain being dissected. Hippolytus reveals as much when he paraphrases at length from a Peratic book which offered a detailed description of the brain's inner workings,<sup>21</sup> complete with rare anatomical terminology that appears elsewhere only in medical authors. The first sentence Hippolytus cites from the Peratic book again contains the presupposition that they had witnessed a brain being dissected: 'For the brain upon dissection (ἀνατμηθείς) has inside it what is called the little vaulted chamber (καμάριον), and on both sides of it there are thin membranes, which they call wings, gently moved by the spirit and which in turn drive the spirit to the cerebellum' (IV 51.11). The 'little vaulted chamber' is better known as the fornix,<sup>22</sup> and it is one of several details in the Peratic account that could only be found in a highly technical discussion of anatomy. Similarly technical details dot the remainder of their account, which is concerned especially with the distribution of spirit to the body: 'The spirit rushes through a reed-like cavity (τινος ἀγγείου καλάμῳ εἰκός) and advances to the little pine cone (κωνάριον), to which the opening of the cerebellum is adjacent, which receives the rushing spirit and distributes it to the so-called spinal marrow, from which the entire body has a share in the spirit' (IV 51.12). The reference to the 'reed-like cavity' establishes without doubt that the Peratae drew from a tradition which derived ultimately from Herophilus of Alexandria, a pioneering anatomist of the third

<sup>19</sup> For the Peratae, see especially the recent discussions of Annarita Magri, 'Il nome dei Perati', *Orpheus* 28 (2007), 138-61, and 'Le serpent guérisseur et l'origine de la gnose ophite', *RHR* 224 (2007), 395-434.

<sup>20</sup> See Galen, *On Anatomical Procedures*, 8.4 (Kühn 2.669).

<sup>21</sup> Hippolytus never directly attributes the material he cites and discusses in IV 51.10-3 to the Peratae, but there are many obvious parallels between this passage and V 17.11-2, which explicitly concerns the Peratae. Hippolytus also mentions several times that he has access to Peratic books: V 13.13, V 14.1, V 14.10, V 15.1.

<sup>22</sup> See Galen, *On the Usefulness of Parts*, 8.11 (Kühn 3.667 = Helmreich 1.484).

century BCE.<sup>23</sup> And the great emphasis that they put on the 'little pine cone', better known as the pineal gland, establishes that they were not influenced by Galen, who criticizes unnamed doctors for assigning too much of a role to this gland in the distribution and regulation of spirit.<sup>24</sup> Galen provides no hints to help identify these doctors whose work seems to have influenced the Peratae, but they presumably were among the anatomists who revitalized medical research and education beginning in the early decades of the second century CE.<sup>25</sup> Alexandria was the major center of the anatomical revival, but it spread also to other cities, including Rome, Pergamum, and Smyrna, all of which are possible locations where the Peratae may have witnessed a public medical demonstration that included a dissection of an animal's brain.<sup>26</sup> Hippolytus' lengthy paraphrase of the Peratic description of the brain reveals the extent of their anatomical and physiological interests, and strongly suggests that they attended medical demonstrations.

Hippolytus' awareness of medical demonstrations is demonstrated best by his account of the Peratae, but he also reveals that there was a broader level of medical interest among other heretical groups. Hippolytus has no problem, for instance, in suggesting that the Naassenes took inspiration from a saying which he attributes to Hippocrates (V 7.20-1). He likewise paraphrases a technical discussion of embryology from the *Great Revelation*, a work attributed to Simon Magus (VI 13.7-11).<sup>27</sup> A similar interest in embryology is found also in his account of the Theodotians (VII 35.2, X 23.1-2), who were his contemporaries at Rome, and who allegedly 'worshipped' Galen, according to another contemporary Christian reporter.<sup>28</sup> Through his

<sup>23</sup> See Herophilus T79 (von Staden) = Galen, *On Anatomical Procedures*, 9.5 (Kühn 2.731). For the life of Herophilus, see Heinrich von Staden, *Herophilus: The Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria: Edition, Translation and Essays* (Cambridge and New York, 1989), 43-50.

<sup>24</sup> See Galen, *On the Usefulness of Parts*, 8.14 (Kühn 3.676 = Helmreich 1.490). The passage is discussed by Julius Rocca, *Galen on the Brain: Anatomical Knowledge and Physiological Speculation in the Second Century AD* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 149-52.

<sup>25</sup> For the anatomical revival, see Mirko D. Grmek and Danielle Gourevitch, 'Aux sources de la médicale de Galien: l'enseignement de Marinus, Quintus et Numisianus', *ANRW II* 37.2 (1994), 1491-1528, 1492.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.* 1523. For the suggestion that the Peratae developed as a group somewhere in Asia Minor during the middle of the second century, see A. Magri, 'Le serpent' (2007), 428. On the use of animal brains, particularly those of cows, for medical demonstrations, see J. Rocca, *Galen on the Brain* (2003), 69-78.

<sup>27</sup> The passage and its system of embryology has recently been discussed by Bernard Pouderon, 'La notice d'Hippolyte sur Simon: cosmologie, anthropologie et embryologie', in Véronique Boudon-Millot and Bernard Pouderon (eds), *Les pères de l'église face à la science médicale de leur temps* (Paris, 2005), 49-71.

<sup>28</sup> See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V 28.14. The author of the work, typically referred to as the 'Little Labyrinth', is unknown, but he was evidently a contemporary of the Theodotians. The author's rather positive attitude to Zephyrinus (*ibid.* V 28.12) establishes that he was not also the author of the *Refutatio*. For discussion of the 'Little Labyrinth' and its attribution, see Pierre Nautin, *Le dossier d'Hippolyte et de Méliton dans les florilèges dogmatiques et chez les historiens modernes* (Paris, 1953), 115-20.

research, Hippolytus was exposed to a surprising amount of anatomical and physiological material, a likely sign that Christians at Rome and elsewhere were indulging their interests in medicine by reading, but also by attending the public demonstrations of doctors.

Hippolytus, in sum, provides a valuable guide to the diverse scholarly and intellectual interests of Christians in the second and early third centuries. And, while it cannot be denied that philosophy loomed largest on the horizon for most Christians with scholarly leanings and pretensions, Hippolytus reveals that some Christians were also taking note of the epideictic displays of Greek sophists and doctors. Hippolytus himself depicts Christian heretics as if they were extemporizing sophists, leading audiences into error with their deceitful tricks. He also provides good reason to believe that some heretics were witnesses of the public medical demonstrations that were taking place in Rome and in other cities of the Mediterranean world. Most of all, Hippolytus shows that Christian scholars were doing more than reading books and keeping to themselves: they were venturing out into public and engaging with the major figures of contemporary intellectual life, including sophists and doctors.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Note also E. Castelli, 'Author of the *Refutatio*' (2011), 231, on the diverse intellectual interests displayed in the *Refutatio*, and the similarity of its author to the contemporaneous Julius Africanus, another resident of Rome.