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Between Scholarship and Myth: The Role of Pythagorean Legacy in the Platonism of Iamblichus[*]

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Abstract. Iamblichus of Chalcis is known as the author of the treatise *On the Pythagorean Life* opening his large compendium *On Pythagoreanism*. In this compilation, the figure of Pythagoras appears no less important than the history of Pythagoreanism in ge-neral. Iamblichus employs certain literary means to emphasise the prophetic status of Pythagoras, who appears to be "the most divine" person of all his contemporaries. However, the second person who also has such a title is Plato. Iamblichus presents an ambiguous relationship between Plato and Pythagoras. On the one hand, Plato is said to be a follower of Pythagoreanism who appropriated the findings of his great forerunner. On the other hand, in other cases, Plato appears as an authority equal to Pythagoras, and their followers are also often mentioned together. In rare cases, Iamblichus explicitly describes what he understands as the teaching of Pythagoreans but this teaching appears scarcely distinguishable from the Platonic doctrine except for special mathematical subjects. Pythagoreanism appears to be less valuable to Iamblichus as an independent school of philosophy. However, the myth of Pythagoras and the mythologised history of Pythagoreanism become a fundamental basis for the Platonic tradition in the treatises of Iamblichus. Through these writings, the Pythagorean myth consolidates as evidence of the divine origin and salutary mission of theurgic Neoplatonism.

Keywords: Pythagoreanism, Iamblichus of Chalcis, Plato, philosophical myth, philosophical history.

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Iamblichus of Chalcis wrote his *De vita Pythagorica* at the time when at least two similar biographical works were already available: Porphyry of Tyre's *Vita Pythagorae* and the chapter dedicated to Pythagoras in Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae philosophorum* (8.1–49). Both Iamblichus' forerunners provided verbose narratives with extensive doxographical material and the account of some basics of the Pythagorean teaching[1]. Moreover, Porphyry's treatise was a part of his larger *Philosophic history*[2]. As for Iamblichus, his treatise is also an opening part of a larger compilation *On Pythagoreanism*[3].

Although there are noticeable differences between Porphyry's and Iamblichus' approaches to investigating the biography of Pythagoras and the history of Pythagoreanism, they have much in common. This common point may be summarised in their two basic objectives: first, to create a comprehensive Pythagorean myth, and, second, to determine the position of the Platonic school in respect to this myth — often in contrast to other philosophical schools (and their myths, if any).

The following discussion will be dedicated to the corpus of Iamblichus' writings and to the means which he employs to depict Plato, Pythagoras and their successors. Our main goal is to clarify where historical narrative transforms into the construction of a philosophical myth, and what place inside it belongs to Plato and Pythagoras.

"The most divine" — Pythagoras and Plato

The title "divine" was applied to Plato centuries before Porphyry and Iamblichus[4]. Plotinus applied this epithet to Plato with the implication

[1] Along with the extant biographies, it seems plausible that Iamblichus could have read and quoted the lives of Pythagoras known to be written by Nicomachus of Gerasa and Apollonius of Tyana, and perhaps even some more. For a detailed discussion of these sources (mostly hypothetical), see O'Meara 2014: 412–415.

[2] Nauck's doubts on whether to include the *Life of Pythagoras* in the *Philosophic history* are almost obviated by recent scholars, see Johnson 2013: 40–41 with notes.

[3] Emma Clarke and John Dillon suggest a longer title: *A Compendium of Pythagorean Doctrine* (Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell 2003: xxiv). On the contents of this compendium, see O'Meara 2014: 400–401.

[4] The *terminus post quem* is the time of Plutarch, who used this epithet several times (*Per.* 8.1; *De cap. ex inim.* 90c13; Ps.-Plut. *Cons. ad Apol.* 120d10).

that Plato had certain prophetic abilities[5]. In the writings of Iamblichus, the word "divine" (θεῖος) in both its positive and comparative forms is used rather frequently and is also applied to Pythagoras and his philosophy, along with many other persons and objects. However, the superlative degree is less common, and its usage can be a terminological marker of high significance.

Iamblichus uses a rather rare epithet θειότατος, 'the most divine', when speaking about Plato and Pythagoras. There are no occurrences of this epithet in relation to any other person in the whole corpus of Iamblichian writings; however, there are "the most divine" objects, which reveal the metaphysical stance of this epithet.

Chronologically, the first occurrence of the word θειότατος is given in a prophetic utterance of Thales about the child Pythagoras:

> he [*sc.* Thales himself] had not been blessed with such advantages of natural endowment and training as he could see in Pythagoras, so from all this he foretold that if Pythagoras associated with the priests he had indicated, he would become the most godlike (θειότατον) of mortals, surpassing all others in wisdom (Iamb. *VP* 2.12.12–17 Klein)[6].

According to Iamblichus, adult Pythagoras actually became the most divine person, and his divinity is connected to one of his philosophical talents. Having quoted one of Pythagoras' aphorisms, Iamblichus remarks: "But not only in that halfline, but in others like it, the most divine Pythagoras hid the sparks of truth for those able to kindle them"[7]. This ability to inspire other people with philosophical

[5] Cf. the wording that Plotinus uses to describe Plato as if he were aware of the daemonic nature of Eros (*Enn.* 3.5.1): Plato appears as a kind of prophet holding some esoteric knowledge unattainable for others. More generally, Plotinus describes the enigmatic style of Plato's writings in connection with its "mystical" contents (*Enn.* 4.8.1). In both cases, Plotinus calls Plato "divine" (ὁ θεῖος Πλάτων). Dominic O'Meara notes that for Plotinus, both Plato and Pythagoras were "among those who had been able to contemplate transcendent intelligible being and to communicate the metaphysical knowledge that this brought" (O'Meara 2014: 403).

[6] English translation: Clark 1989: 5.

[7] Iamb. *VP* 29.162.3–6: ὁ θειότατος Πυθαγόρας τὰ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐνέκρυπτε ζώπυρα τοῖς δυναμένοις ἐναύσασθαι; tr. Clark 1989: 72.

vigour can probably be related to what Iamblichus understands as "divinity". In the *Protrepticus*' colophon, the entire Pythagorean teaching is also called "the most noble and most divine philosophy (θειοτάτην φιλοσοφίαν)" (Iamb. *Protr.* 3.12), which is concealed in poetic aphorisms with a hortatory sense. As Dominic O'Meara notes, the whole story of Pythagoras' life is "not a biographical narrative, but an accumulation of evidences and signs, recognized by those that witnessed them, of Pythagoras' unique relation to the divine, his privileged access to intelligible truths, and his soteriological mission"[8].

Concerning Plato, Iamblichus uses the epithet θειότατος rather infrequently and always within attributions of quotations: "as the most divine Plato says" — there are three such occurrences[9]. The common subject of these three passages is a more or less explicit connection with "mathematical sciences (τὰ μαθήματα)". As long as all these occurrences are located in Iamblichus' "Pythagorean" works, the mentions of Plato are mere references to external evidence rather than a dedicated discussion of Plato's teaching.

As far as there are only two persons that deserve the title of not just "divine", but "the most divine", i.e. Pythagoras and Plato, it may be just a figure of reverence and corresponding deferential wording[10]. But if we take into account that Iamblichus uses philosophical terms rather carefully[11], it is plausible that the word θειότατος may have some stable and definite meaning.

When "the most divine" becomes an epithet of impersonal objects, Iamblichus sometimes implies the intelligible realm as a whole or some particular entities inside or related to it. For instance, he speaks of a personal daemon of one's soul, besides which it is impossible to reach "the most divine (τὸ θειότατον) and most principal [part] of our sub-

[8] O'Meara 1990: 39.

[9] Iamb. *Comm. math.* 7.63–74; *In Nic.* 9.1–14 and 83.9–18. The first two passages are very similar up to minor literary details.

[10] Cf. conclusion of Mark Edwards: Iamblichus "has stripped him [Pythagoras] of his divinity, but only to reveal him as a man of divine capacities" (Edwards 1993: 170).

[11] Cf., for instance, the theurgic language of Iamblichus and his teaching on symbols: Kurdybaylo 2025.

stance (τῆς οὐσίας)" (Iamb. *Protr.* 15.3–5). Similarly, the universal intellect is said to possess "the most divine and most perfect powers (τῶν θειοτάτων καὶ τελειοτάτων ἐνεργειῶν)" (Iamb. *Protr.* 18.4–5), and "the order of the visible universe is established by the most divine Logos"[12].

In the sensible realm, "the most venerable (τιμιωτάτην) and the most divine order (θειοτάτην τάξιν)" embraces the celestial luminaries and all objects that are "comprehended via the astronomical science" (Iamb. *Comm. math.* 23.71–73). Several lines below, Iamblichus gives a more general conclusion: theoretical sciences as a whole deal with "the most common natures and the most divine of what we can perceive with senses"[13]. Finally, among all the goods that a human being owns by their nature, the soul is the most divine entity, according to Iamblichus[14].

It appears that "the most divine" is not always an intelligible entity, but it is always located at the highest and the most perfect level of the respective ontological order — pertaining either to the whole universe, the sensible world, or human nature. Following the Iamblichian concept of participation[15], the highest level of any ontological order participates in another ontological order, a higher one and even more perfect. If Pythagoras and Plato can be considered "the most divine" among all people, it can mean that the whole order of humans participates in a higher order, the divine one, by virtue of its two representatives. Thus, Pythagoras and Plato appear as philosophical prophets who mediate between the realm of the gods and other mortals. Although we have no direct evidence, it would be no surprise if a more advanced exposition of Iamblichus' teaching could engage the figures of Pythagoras and Plato into his doctrine of Neoplatonic theurgy.

However, as indirect evidence of this kind, we can consider two mentions of Plato and Pythagoras in *De mysteriis*, where Iamblichus argues

[12] Iamb. *Comm. math.* 6.25–26: τὸν ὅλον κόσμον, ὃν ἔταξε λόγος ὁ πάντων θειότατος ὁρατόν.

[13] Iamb. *Comm. math.* 23.80–81: τὰ κοινότατά τε τῆς φύσεώς εἰσι καὶ τῶν ἡμῖν αἰσθητῶν τὰ θειότατα.

[14] Iamb. *Protr.* 29.16–17; cf. 32.10–12 with a similar understanding of a human soul.

[15] See Shaw 1995: 66.

that both philosophers visited Egypt, where they stayed for quite a long time and were edified in sacred teachings:

> Yet if you put forward a philosophical question, we will settle this also for you by recourse to the ancient stelae of Hermes, to which Plato before us, and Pythagoras too, gave careful study in the establishment of their philosophy (Iamb. *Myst.* 1.2.7–10)[16].

In another passage, Iamblichus mentions Pythagoras and Plato, along with "Democritus and Eudoxus and many other of the Hellenes of old" (Iamb. *Myst.* 1.1.13–15), who all have visited Egypt[17]. As Democritus was a disciple of Philolaus, and Eudoxus was a disciple of Archytas, it is plausible that Iamblichus considered them as Pythagoreans as well.

Nevertheless, Iamblichus does not always put Plato with Pythagoras as distinguished philosophers in opposition to others, "less divine" ones. There are many cases when Plato is mentioned among other Pythagoreans, and among other philosophers in general. Below, we will address some relevant passages.

Plato the stealer of Pythagorean wisdom

In the *Vita Pythagorae*, Porphyrius reports that Pythagoreans accused Plato, Aristoteles, Speusippus, Aristoxenus, and Xenocrates of misappropriating the findings of the Pythagoreans, having altered those in minor details[18] Moreover, Plato and his successors are said to ridicule the original Pythagorean teaching by rendering it in an intentionally distorted and primitive way (Porph. *VP* 53.9–16). In other words, Plato and his disciples are depicted as thieves of Pythagorean wisdom and calumniators of Pythagoras' school. Of course, Porphyrius

[16] English translation: Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell 2003: 9.

[17] See Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell 2003: 5, n. 5.

[18] Of course, this is not the first case of such accusations. For instance, Timon of Phlius declared that Plato had bought a book of Pythagorean writings for a fabulous price and then rewrote that book into the *Timaeus* — this story is reported by Aulus Gellius (3.17.4; Timon of Phlius fr. 828, Lloyd-Jones, Parsons 1983: 387) and by Iamblichus (*In Nic.* 105.12–17); cf. also John Tzetzes' testimony and its discussion in Garadja 2018: 101–102. Modern scholars' views of Pythagorean influence on Plato are rather problematic; for an introduction, see Palmer 2014.

does not resolutely support this standpoint, and this evidence occurs only once in his writings.

However, Iamblichus goes further. For him, it is less difficult to accuse Plato of borrowing another's knowledge; however, he does his best to clearly specify which particular part of the Pythagorean teaching was appropriated by Plato, and whether it was actually appropriation or just evidence of being engaged with the tradition.

It appears obvious to Iamblichus that Plato himself became a more influential philosopher than Pythagoras and his school. Thus, even if Plato was just a disciple of Pythagoras and a successor of his doctrine, nevertheless, Plato's fame overshadowed that of Pythagoras. Iamblichus could feel himself struggling for a kind of historical justice to restore Pythagorean authorship in subjects which are mistakenly considered Platonic. Nevertheless, Iamblichus keeps an impartial attitude to what is Platonic by right.

Iamblichus is very specific in his evidence that allows us to make a list of Plato's borrowings from Pythagoras:

> Pythagoras also invented the whole system of political education. … He constructed, as it were, three lines, representing forms of government, and connected them at the ends to make a right-angled triangle: one side has the nature of the epitritos[19], the hypotenuse measures five, and the third is in the middle of the other two. If we calculate the angles at which the lines meet, and the squares on each side, we have an excellent model of a constitution. Plato appropriated this idea, when he expressly mentioned, in the *Republic*, the first two numbers in the ratio of four to three which join with the fifth to make the two harmonies (Iamb. *VP* 27.130.11–131.6).

> The origin of justice, then, is community feeling and fairness, for all to share experience, approximating as closely as possible to one body and one soul, and for everyone to say "mine" and "someone else's" about the same thing (just as Plato also testifies, having learnt it from the Pythagoreans) (Iamb. *VP* 30.167.6–10).

[19] Greek ἐπίτριτος means any object consisting of a whole and one third, i.e. 1 + 1/3 = 4/3. Here, this ratio is taken as connecting the triangle's sides of length 3 and 4.

Iamblichus provides even more details on pure mathematical subjects, which have a history of research prior to Plato. Firstly, recalling the evidence of Timon of Phlius about Plato's usage of a Pythagorean book when composing the *Timaeus*, Iamblichus explains what exactly Plato could have borrowed from Timaeus of Locri: it is the theory of the geometrical mean, which is actually mentioned in Plato's *Timaeus*[20].

Another type of proportion, the "musical" one, according to Iamblichus, was discovered by the Babylonians, and Pythagoras introduced it to the Hellenes. Later this proportion was "used by Aristaeus of Kroton, Timaeus of Locri, Philolaus, Archytas of Tarentum, and many others, and finally, by Plato in the *Timaeus*" (Iamb. *In Nic.* 118.19–119.2).

As an intermediate conclusion, Iamblichus enumerates six types of proportions and the corresponding six types of mean values. All six types were discovered by Archytas and Hippasus, and were subsequently used by many philosophers and mathematicians from the time of Plato to that of Eratosthenes (Iamb. *In Nic.* 116.1–4).

Two more general pieces of evidence include a calculation of the period between the times when Pythagoras and Plato lived. Iamblichus evaluates it as follows: "It is agreed that Aristaios, son of Damophon of Kroton, was Pythagoras' heir in everything. He lived in Pythagoras' own time, about seven generations (ἑπτὰ γενεαῖς) before Plato" (Iamb. *VP* 36.265.1–4). Iamblichus also mentions another Pythagorean set of books, which Plato also bought in his early years: namely, three volumes of Philolaus' writings, which were full either of repetitions, or inane digressions from the subject matter — both senses can be rendered by the Greek θρυλλούμενος used here[21]. In any case, however, Iamblichus emphasises that Philolaus' book was not of high quality, while Plato paid a rather high price for it.

When compared to earlier evidence of Plato stealing Pythagorean wisdom, Iamblichus appears more balanced. Firstly, he adequately rep-

[20] Iamblichus quotes Pl. *Ti.* 31c4–32a6 in *In Nic.* 105.2–10.

[21] Iamb. *VP* 31.199.2–10. Probably, Iamblichus uses the evidence of Diogenes, who mentions the same story but characterises the books of Philolaos as διαβόητα ('well-known' or 'famous', D.L. 8.15.1–3, cf. also 3.9.1–5) instead of θρυλλούμενα.

resents the historical distance between Pythagoras and Plato. Therefore, some theoretical findings of Pythagoreans have been used by Greek thinkers before Plato, and Plato just continued to use this knowledge. Secondly, almost all of Plato's borrowings from Pythagoreans touch upon either pure mathematics or mathematical analogies with other subjects, such as politics or ethics. It is interesting to note that Plato never refers to Pythagorean *acousmata* and their symbolic interpretations[22] — a matter of great concern for Porphyrius and Iamblichus. Thirdly, Plato, despite aspiring to Pythagorean wisdom by dint of being familiar with their books, is not portrayed as fully satisfied. Moreover, one may infer that Plato himself felt cheated, as his philosophical expectations were not fulfilled by the actual contents of Pythagorean writings. Finally, despite Pythagoras' obvious precedence to Plato and the consequent influence on his philosophy, Iamblichus seems to take pains to minimise the sphere of subjects, in which Plato can be accused of any dependence on Pythagoreans. At any rate, Iamblichus' evidence suggests that Pythagorean borrowings in Plato's works do not play a principal role and remain peripheral to the core of Platonic doctrine.

At the same time, Plato was accused of plagiarism regarding not only the Pythagorean legacy but also the wisdom of the Hebrews — it was a rather frequent opinion among Christian exegetes since Clement of Alexandria[23] who quoted the famous locution ascribed to Numenius of Apamea about Plato, the second "Moses speaking in Attic Greek" (Numen. fr. 8 Des Places). Noticeably, Origen interpreted Plato's myth of Eros in the *Symposium* in relation to the Biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve[24], while Clement discovered many motifs of the Bible and Christian theology in the vision of Er from Plato's *Republic*[25]. An-

[22] Among non-Pythagoreans, the first known commentaries on *acousmata* belong to Anaximander the Younger and Aristoteles (Thom 2013: 78). Probably, they could have been available to Plato as well, even if he had no direct contact with the Pythagorean school.

[23] Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.17.87.1–7; 5.1.10.1–2; 5.14.92.1–2; 5.14.94.3–6, etc.

[24] Pl. *Smp.* 203b2–e5, quoted and interpreted by Origen in *Cels.* 4.39.16–68, Borret 1968: 284–288.

[25] Pl. *R.* 614b–617e, quoted and discussed several times: *Strom.* 5.14.90.5–91.5,

other possible reminiscence of Er's myth is provided by Eusebius of Caesarea[26].

In other words, Plato appears as a person, who appropriated the teaching of Pythagoras, the wisdom of Moses and the Hebrew Bible, not to mention Socrates' ethics[27] and Heraclitus' physics, as Diogenes notes (D.L. 3.8.7–10). Surprisingly, the fact of plagiarism (either true or not) may not sound as derogatory in Plato's address. Perhaps, the case of Christian criticism appears the most distinct: insofar as Plato is considered a plagiarist of Moses, his teaching contains something borrowed from his holy source. Consequently, Platonic philosophy is not just a product of pagan culture, but to some extent is congener to Christianity. Similarly, the "stolen" Pythagorean wisdom in Plato's writings not only posits him as a secondary author, but also as a participant in the sacred ancient doctrine of the divine Pythagoras. As far as Plato appears to be "the most divine", he had to be introduced into a tradition that is much older than himself.

In a pagan context, the language of plagiarism or theft regarding divine knowledge — especially the knowledge concealed from mortals — restores the myth of Prometheus. A stealer of divine wisdom can be a "culture hero" for the realm of humans[28]. This implication adds another detail to the idea of Plato's divinity and his stealing the Pythagorean wisdom — these two *topoi* can be connected together, es-

103.2–5, 106.2–4, 136.4. More on Pythagorean myth in Clement and Iamblichus, see Afonasin 2012.

[26] Eusebius discusses the quotation from *Zech.* 14:4 with the imagery borrowed from the *Republic* 614cd, however not mentioning Plato by name (*DE* 6.18.28–31, Heikel 1913: 279–280). A discussion on the connection between these texts: Kurdybaylo 2022: 153–154.

[27] Here I use "ethics" to render original τὰ πολιτικά. It is noteworthy that Socrates, despite his famous daemon, is not considered as a divine person in Platonic tradition — in a contrast with Christian apologists, who engaged the imagery of Socrates as a "Christian before Christ" (cf. Svetlov 2017).

[28] However, not only pagan writers, but also Origen took much effort to argue for heavenly origins of earthly wisdom, sciences, and culture (*Princ.* 3.3). Similarly, Clement applied the metaphor of Prometheus to the origins of ancient Greek philosophy (*Strom.* 1.17.87.1–2).

pecially if we recall that Pythagoras himself had been compared with Prometheus at least since the times of Aristoxenus[29].

Plato and Pythagoras as equal authorities

Despite the implicit or explicit opposition of Plato to Pythagoras, Iamblichus finds many possibilities to mention them together in contexts that imply an equal level of authority. Three fragments in the *De anima* mention both philosophers, and Plato does not follow Pythagoras but precedes him:

> It is these doctrines to which Plato himself and Pythagoras, and Aristotle, and all the ancients who have gained great and honorable names for wisdom, are completely committed, as one will find if he investigates their opinions with scientific rigor… (Iamb. *An.* 7.366)[30].
>
> According to those who think that the soul lives a double life, one in itself and one in conjunction with the body, they are present in the soul in one way but in the common animal in another, as Plato and Pythagoras think (Iamb. *An.* 10.368).
>
> the Peripatetic doctrine is that the acts of the soul concern only the living being and the composite. … But Plato and Pythagoras, placing its essence in the highest rank, as being supernatural and a generator of natural life, grant its acts to be superior to and more worthy of honor than Nature (Iamb. *An.* 22.374).

This metaphysical unanimity of Plato and Pythagoras, especially with Plato mentioned in the first place, requires detailed investigation. The first passage quoted above appeals to the general idea of the intermediate ontological position of the soul between intellectual and bodiless entities on the one hand, and embodied and sensual ones on the other. Obviously, this conception is primarily a Platonic view and can hardly be ascribed to Pythagoras in its full form. Incidentally, the mention of Aristotle can be better understood if we take into account

[29] For a detailed discussion, see Huffman 2014: 286–291.

[30] English translation: Finamore, Dillon 2002: 30.

Iamblichus' view that Aristotle's *Categories* were written under the strong influence of Archytas[31] — of course, a fallacious opinion[32].

The second passage addresses the question of the "double life" of the soul. Opposite opinions include the positions of the Stoics and Peripatetics: though both maintain that the soul has only one mode of existence, they depict this existence rather differently. Pythagoras here appears as a mere reproducer of Platonic doctrine — it is hardly possible to imagine that either Pythagoras himself or early Pythagoreans could have had such an elaborated doctrine[33].

The third passage operates with Soul and Nature as clearly distinguished ontological levels. As we know, even Plotinus did not consider Nature in such precise terms. Obviously, Pythagoras here is just stands in for Neoplatonists and, possibly, some very advanced Middle Platonists. Moreover, this passage also removes Plato from his historical context in a similar way.

In some contexts, Iamblichus makes both Plato and Pythagoras mere literary characters, who communicate his own beliefs or the doctrines of the most recent of his Neoplatonic forerunners. To some extent, this impersonation can be compared with the style of Plato's dialogues, whose personages, pretending to be real historical persons, express ideas strongly moderated by Plato himself.

Iamblichus also often mentions the followers of Plato and Pythagoras; however, all such passages occur only in the *De anima*. The most interesting aspect is that Iamblichus reports on the diversity of opinions inside the integral Platonic and/or Pythagorean tradition:

> while Plotinus, Porphyry, and Amelius have taught that it is attunement (ἁρμονία) as residing in essentially preexistent reason-principles (ἐν λόγοις τοῖς κατ' οὐσίαν προϋπάρχουσι); while many of the Platonists and Pythagoreans adjudge it to be the attunement which is interwoven with the cosmos and inseparable (ἀχώριστον) from the heaven (Iamb. *An.* 5.365).

[31] See numerous references to Iamblichus and Archytas in Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories*.

[32] See O'Meara 2014: 405; on Aristotle's views of Pythagoreans see Primavesi 2014.

[33] More discussion of this passage see in: Helmig 2014: 153–154.

The last sentence implies the "harmony of the spheres", which actually has a Pythagorean origin[34] and occupies a significant place in Plato's dialogues[35]. Another example of rather historical imagery of both schools touches upon the eschatological doctrine of final punishment, which has four different interpretations. About all four, Iamblichus says: "Many Platonists and Pythagoreans hover around opinions such as these"[36]. Another passage mentions the philosophers, who incorrectly estimate the main purpose of a soul's purifications: "Among these thinkers are many Platonists and Pythagoreans, although they differ among themselves about the specifics of the doctrine" (Iamb. *An.* 43.456). Within such statements, Iamblichus renders a very generalising picture, which, naturally, fits historical Platonism and Pythagoreanism as well.

However, more specific evidence on Pythagorean teaching appears more questionable. For instance, Iamblichus writes:

> Plato and his school, Archytas, and the rest of the Pythagoreans assert that the soul is tripartite, dividing it into reason (λογισμόν), spirit (θυμόν), and desire (ἐπιθυμίαν), for these are useful for establishing the system of virtues (Iamb. *An.* 12.369).

According to John Dillon and John Finamore, neither Archytas', nor Pseudo-Archytas' writings contain this tripartite model of a soul, which is obviously of Platonic origin. Some late Pythagoreans could have adopted it, as Joannes Stobaeus ascribes it to an otherwise unknown Pythagorean Aesarus of Lucania (Stob. *Anth.* 1.49.27). Another Platonic concept is also presented as Pythagorean:

> Let us then next determine what agency accomplishes each of these processes of judgment, punishment and purification. Most Pythagoreans and Platonists say that it is the individual souls themselves; the more precise among them say the more universal and perfect souls, the one Whole Soul, the arrangement of the universe, and the Intellect which rules over the whole universe (Iamb. *An.* 40.385).

[34] Arist. *Cael.* 290b12–291a26; Simp. *In Cael.* 7.463.12–465.5.

[35] Pl. *Ti.* 35b; *R.* 616b1–617b7.

[36] See the context in Iamb. *An.* 42.455.

Obviously, Pythagoreans had the concept of an individual soul, and their doctrine of metempsychosis could not be established without some rules of after-death retribution. However, the advanced classification of different souls and the levels of punishment and purification can hardly be derived from ancient Pythagoreanism. Either earlier Pythagorean doctrine was unaware of such subtle distinctions, and thus their opposition to other teaching is somehow irrelevant; or Iamblichus just implies that some late Pythagoreans were strongly influenced by Platonism.

One more point of contact is related to the interpretation of Plato's concept of *anamnesis*:

> The followers of Plato and Pythagoras say that reason (λόγος) is present in the newly-born but is obscured by external influences and does not exercise its proper activity but remains dormant (ἡσυχάζειν) (Iamb. *An.* 15.318).

Dillon and Finamore note that "it is not clear what Iamblichus has in mind here … when he refers to Pythagoras"[37]. It appears that "the followers of Pythagoras" here are more Platonists than Pythagoreans proper. In any way, we know no historical persons to be identified with these Pythagoreans, and Iamblichus provides no clue to identify them.

Another important feature of the *De anima* is that neither Pythagoras, nor the Pythagoreans are mentioned in the treatise alone. They are always referred to together with other philosophers — always Plato or Platonists and incidentally Aristotle, Peripatetics, etc. The only exception is the passage, where only Pythagoreans are enumerated, however the list begins with Xenocrates (Iamb. *An.* 4.364) — the second scholarch of the Athenian Academy, who obviously was no less a Platonist than a Pythagorean[38].

By contrast, Iamblichus mentions various opinions of Plato and either unnamed or named Platonists — there are several dozen such passages, which are especially frequent in the *De anima*. In the *De anima*,

[37] Finamore, Dillon 2002: 118.

[38] See a very balanced discussion of Xenocrates' Pythagoreanism in the Platonic context in Dillon 2014: 254–257; Dillon 2019.

the Pythagorean tradition appears more like a branch of Platonism than an independent philosophical school. The uniqueness of Pythagoreanism is mostly related to the mathematical teaching, which is weakly related to the problems of a soul. In the major metaphysical and anthropological contexts, Pythagoras of Iamblichus' echoes the fundamentals of Platonic doctrine. However, when Iamblichus addresses the disagreements inside the Platonic tradition, Pythagoras is opposed to them as a representative of the commonly accepted truth.

Despite Iamblichus' knowledge of particular Pythagoreans both of Plato's times and his contemporaries, Pythagoreanism as a whole appears not only as a certain teaching but also as a semi-mythological kernel of Platonic tradition. The images of "the most divine" Pythagoras and "the most divine" Plato form a convincing foundation for the mainstream branch of Platonism, which Iamblichus pretends to belong to. It is noteworthy that Julian the Emperor placed the "truly divine Iamblichus" in third place after Pythagoras and Plato (Jul. *Ep.* 12.8–10 Bidez).

Conclusion

The works of Iamblichus are rather different in their subjects and the audience they were written for. More "academic" *De anima* and commentaries to Plato's dialogues contain detailed references to certain doctrines of Platonists and Pythagoreans from ancient times to Iamblichus' contemporaries. More "propaedeutic" *Protrepticus* and *De vita Pythagorica* make more effort to produce a more artistic depiction of Pythagoras as the founder of the ancient philosophical tradition. The *De mysteriis* facilitates the reader to dwell upon the theurgic background of what Iamblichus pretends to show as genuine Platonic and Pythagorean doctrine.

This latter point seems to explain Iamblichus' main goal: Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism are considered as a kernel of Platonic philosophy. Firstly, it is based on ancient Egyptian tradition, and Pythagoras himself appears as the first and the eldest of the Hellenes to adopt it. Secondly, Pythagoras is "the most divine" person, whatever this

could mean, and his "divinity" is then passed to Plato — either due to his Pythagorean apprenticeship, or by stealing their wisdom. At any rate, Plato appears to be a full-fledged heir of Pythagoras, despite a faint note of derogation. Thirdly, Iamblichus does not refer to certain Pythagorean concepts without simultaneously addressing Platonic doctrine (and some others as well). Pythagoreanism as a scholarly tradition, after Speusippus and Xenocrates, becomes rather a branch of Platonism than an independent school. However, the Pythagorean myth becomes a means of legitimazing or strengthening particular Platonic positions.

Finally, we can conclude that Iamblichus engages the figure of Pythagoras to create a large philosophical myth of Platonic tradition. Porphyry started his project of *Philosophical history* with quite a rational objective, searching for ancient authorities to reinforce the Platonic school, which made great advances thanks to Plotinus. Iamblichus continued Porphyry's effort but did it in a more "religious" way[39]: through the codification of the most important of Plato's dialogues[40], the designation of the ancient founders of the tradition as "the most divine", and the introduction of worship governed by specific rules. At the same time, Iamblichus remains committed to a precise scrutiny of Plato's dialogues and accompanying texts which, at their highest, has been called theology for centuries.

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[39] See also the comparison of Porphyry's editorial work with the *Enneads* of Plotinus and that of Iamblichus with the *On Pythagoreanism* in O'Meara 2014: 403–404.

[40] On the curriculum of Iamblichus, see Festugière 1969. Dominic O'Meara suggests that the choice of dialogues in the curriculum (at least, some of them) had a certain numerical background stated in a Pythagorean manner (O'Meara 2014: 406). In my opinion, this is rather a questionable explanation. If some arithmetical motivation could have been added, that could have been done *a posteriori*, after the curriculum was completely composed.

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