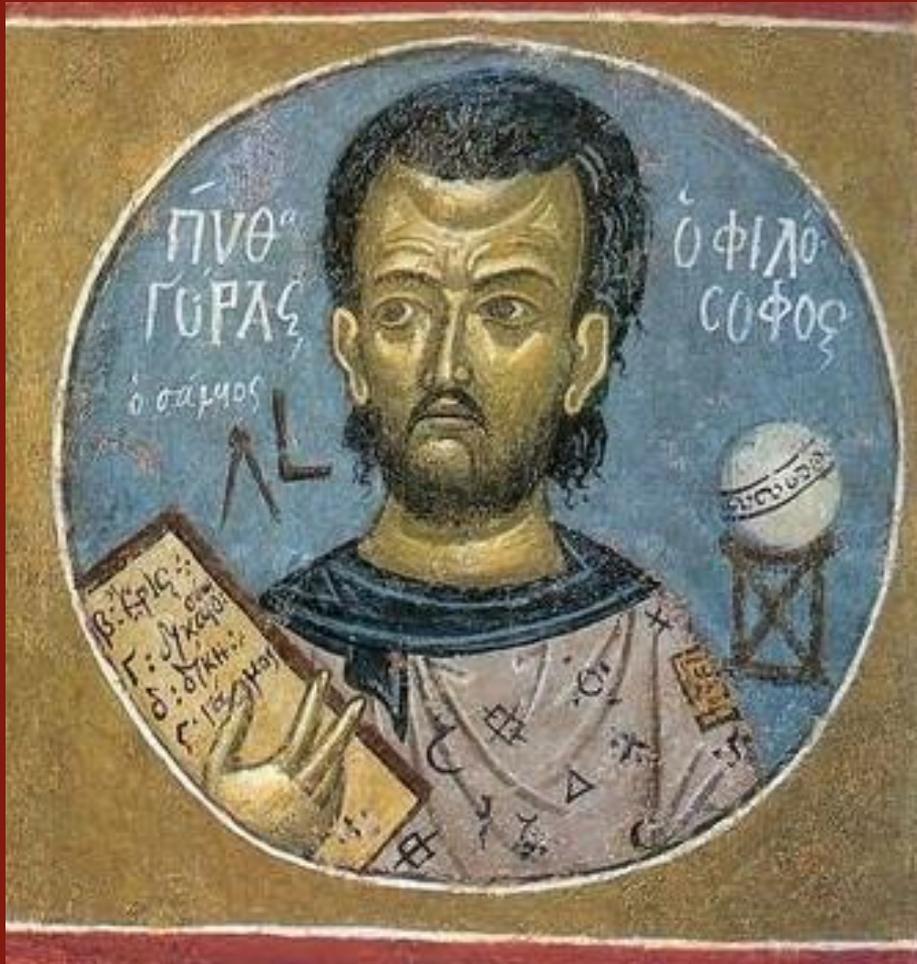


RESEARCH PROJECT

PYTHAGORAS BYZANTINUS

*PYTHAGORAS AND PYTHAGOREANISM
IN BYZANTINE THOUGHT AND CULTURE*



Photis Kontoglou, Pythagoras of Samos, the Philosopher, 1932

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I. AIM

The *Pythagoras Byzantinus* (hereafter *PB*) research project aims to fill an important gap in our knowledge and understanding of the history and forms of reception of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Middle and Late Byzantium, a gap that has been highlighted in the international academic bibliography.

In contrast to other Medieval traditions (Latin, Arabic, Syriac and Jewish), the reception of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Byzantium has not yet been studied systematically. In the relevant bibliography, there are only sporadic or fragmentary references to Pythagorean resonances in Middle and Late Byzantine texts, while the number of articles dealing with it is still extremely limited. At the same time, eminent contemporary historians of philosophy have repeatedly stressed the need to explore this rather understudied thematic field.

In his contribution on "Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages" (in *A History of Pythagoreanism*, edited by Carl A. Huffman, Cambridge University Press 2014, p. 421), Andrew Hicks notes that "This chapter cannot encompass the full sweep of late ancient and medieval invocations of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans (a book-length treatment remains a desideratum), which, ideally, would include Byzantine (e.g., Photius, Michael Psellus, Bryennius, Plethon), Arabic [...] and Arabo-Persian traditions [...]". Since then, while research on the Arabic and Arabo-Persian traditions has already borne fruit, the same cannot be said for the Byzantine tradition, especially for the Middle and Late periods.

In the recently published *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Leiden-Boston 2021), the editors of the collective volume (I. Caiazzo, C. Macris and A. Robert) stress that "the Middle and Late Byzantine periods still give the impression of a completely unexplored *terra incognita*: to date there are neither detailed studies nor concise overviews devoted to this aspect of the reception of Pythagoreanism". And they add that it is an almost 'virgin' field waiting to be thoroughly studied [Introduction, pp. 3-4].

It is also worth noting that in the rich, ambitious and thorough volume edited by A. Kaldellis and N. Siniosoglou entitled *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge 2018), the presence of Pythagoras is completely marginal, and any mention of him is made only in passing. And the same can be observed, with a few exceptions, in other important volumes previously published on Byzantine philosophy: see, for instance, K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources* (Oxford 2002); B. Bydén & K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy* (Athens 2012).

Finally, Dominic J. O'Meara, the Scientific Advisor of the *PB* research project, in his pioneering book *Pythagoras Revived. Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1989), studied in detail the reception of Pythagorean ideas from Iamblichus to Proclus and included relevant texts by the Byzantine scholar Michael Psellos (11th c.) on the philosophy of numbers inspired by Iamblichus, while in the 17th chapter of the collective volume edited by Gabriele Cornelli, Richard McKirahan and Constantinos Macris entitled *On Pythagoreanism* (Berlin 2013, pp. 405-420), D. J. O' Meara extended his research mainly to Damascius, Olympiodorus and the Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle. However, and with the exception of the case of Michael Psellos, these two reference studies do not extend chronologically beyond the 6th century. The Neoplatonic sources of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium on

which they focus our attention emerge as a key vehicle and channel for the transmission of (Neo)Pythagoreanism in the later phases of Byzantine thought, and their manifold influence on Byzantine scholars, especially from the 9th century onwards, is an open and promising field of research.

In order to fill this existing research gap and improve our understanding of the reception of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Middle and Late Byzantium, our interdisciplinary research will be articulated and developed mainly around six thematic axes:

1. Pythagoras and the mathematical sciences (*quadrivium*) in Byzantine sources.
 - a) Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.
 - b) Arithmology and philosophy of numbers (applications in physiology, physics, ethics, theology, magic, etc.).
2. The occult Pythagoras and proto-sciences (alchemy and astrology).
3. Pythagorean way of life: ethical and political echoes and revivals in Byzantine literature and culture.
4. References to and appropriations of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Byzantine culture:
 - a) Means of transmission and transformations of Pythagorean philosophy.
 - b) Antiquarian and encyclopedic knowledge.
 - c) Rhetorical motifs and rhetorical references to Pythagoras/Pythagoreanism.
 - d) Representations of Pythagoras in Byzantine art.
5. Pythagorean echoes in Christian forms of asceticism (silence, fasting, vegetarianism, and miracles), Byzantine hagiology, religious piety and theological discourse (*secrecy* and *enigma* in the formulation and transmission of theological doctrines).
6. Ambivalence to and criticism of Pythagoras and (Neo) Pythagoreanism in Byzantium and in relation to major theological debates and conflicts (Iconoclasm, Hesychasm).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Given the thematic and temporal scope of the research field, the implementation of the *PB* project requires the synergy of an international interdisciplinary team of specialists, consisting of historians of philosophy, ideas, religion(s) and sciences, philologists and Byzantinists. The selection of the proposed speakers who will be invited to participate in the *PB* research project is based on prior inquiry carried out by the Coordinators of the Project in order to identify the leading experts who can shed light and provide insightful thoughts on the presence and meaning of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Byzantine thought and culture, especially from the 8th to the 15th centuries.

In each seminar, two to three invited researchers and professors of renowned scientific prestige, as well as young researchers (doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers) with scientific interests related to Pythagoreanism and Byzantine literature will present a topic or a Byzantine author based on the above-mentioned thematic axes of study.

The three-hour, online, bi-monthly seminars will be held in English and/or French, from December 2022 to June 2023 and from October 2023 to June 2024, and will include, in addition to the presentations, an extensive discussion between the

speakers and the participants. In addition to the invited speakers, the *BP* Project Coordinators, and the Scientific Advisor, the seminars will be attended by: (a) interested experts of the research community from all over the world, (b) researchers from the Research Centre for Greek Philosophy of the Academy of Athens and the French CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique).

At the end of the first and second cycle of seminars (in June 2023 and 2024), two hybrid Workshops will be held in Athens with the presence of the Project Coordinators, the Scientific Advisor and an invited speaker who will give a keynote lecture on Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Byzantium.

III. OBJECTIVES AND IMPACT

The *PB* project will comprise a research part and a diffusion part. Its main deliverable will be a thematic volume based on the presentations of the seminars and workshops. The volume will be submitted for publication to an international editing house in 2025 and will be edited by Eudoxie Delli, Constantinos Macris and Dominic J. O'Meara.

At the end of the research project, the *PB* Coordinators will present the research findings of the online seminars and the two Workshops in Athens and Paris (Academy of Athens - Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique / CNRS).

The proposed *PB* research project aims to highlight the diversity of reception and the multiple fields in which survivals or influences, creative assimilations, selective transformations or even falsifications of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism can be detected during the Middle and Late Byzantine period, covering a wide range of topics from philosophy and religion to education, sciences and political ideas.

The *BP* research project does not aim to exhaustively examine the transformations of the 'image' of Pythagoras and Pythagorean philosophy in Byzantine sources, but to focus, in particular, on important aspects of the stratified and ambiguous, but creative relationship between Byzantine thought and this particular philosophical movement, its doctrines, its history and its protagonists, through the scientific cooperation and dialogue that will be developed in the context of the seminars.

Since this research has never been done before on the Middle and Late Byzantine period, we believe that the publication of the special collective volume, which will summarize the research findings of the seminars while creating an international network of researchers, will be a valuable contribution to the scholarly community, making visible an important but rather neglected period in the history of the reception and transformations of the legendary figure of Pythagoras and his philosophical teaching.

Professor Dominic J. O'Meara will be the Scientific Advisor of the *Pythagoras Byzantinus* research project. Given his long and fruitful research experience, international reputation and wealth of work on Neoplatonism and the reception of Pythagoreanism in Late Antiquity and Byzantine philosophy, he will collaborate with the Research Coordinators to ensure the success of the project. He will also participate in the two workshops (June 2023 and June 2024) in Athens, as well as in the inaugural hybrid seminar to be held on 16 December 2022 at the *Elli Lambrides Philosophical Library* (Research Centre for Greek philosophy - Academy of Athens).