Pythagoras as Moral Authority in Theodore Metochites

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This paper explores the presence of Pythagoras, his life and legacy in the work of the Constantinopolitan scholar and statesman of the late Byzantine period Theodore Metochites (1270-1332). It argues that the main function of Pythagorean references in the *Orations* and the *Sententious Remarks* is to offer moralising force to Metochites' discourse aimed at the ethical improvement of his elite audience. In that sense, Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism are a symbol of moral authority, as shown in the first section of the paper. On another level, the figure of Pythagoras also works as a moral exemplum or less often as anti-exemplum targeted at directing the late Byzantine audience to embrace or reject certain manners or courses in life. By means of the Pythagorean moral capital, Metochites succeeds in advertising righteousness and a life of self-control and discipline, as argued in the second part of the paper. In all instances Metochites' dialogue with Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism appears to be responsive and creative as regards the modification of select dicta and passages belonging to the Pythagorean tradition, since our author clearly reformulates Pythagorean admonitions or details and stories from Pythagoras' life to enhance their moralising effect in the context of his narrative.