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The Images of Pythagoras in Later Tradition

In order to form an image of Pythagoras students of Antiquity tend to base themselves – more or less (un)critically – on the greater expositions by Porphyry and Iamblichus, while other sources, if considered, are frequently taken out of their context. A striking example of this sort is the second century CE Alexandrian polymath Clement. Developing his variant of the “exhortation to philosophy”, he was much concerned with the educational value of the Pythagorean way of life, while the biographical circumstances, designed to place the ancient sage in the proper cultural context, did not concern him much. In this respect Clement, firstly, clearly occupies an intermediate position between the Neopythagorean biographical tradition, firmly based on Nicomachus, and that more or less vague and diffuse literary situation which preceded the great Neoplatonic synthesis and, secondly, as a relatively independent student of Pythagoreanism, freely appropriating his sources for quite external purposes, he often appears to be a good and disengaged witness.

The subject is vast, and what I want to do for the present occasion is to look attentively at a selection of places from the *Stromateis* where Clement presents us with an image of the Pythagorean tradition, more or less common but not devoid of interesting details. For one thing, two-fold ‘Pythagorean’ education is considered by him a well-designed technique, which gradually leads the students to the ‘revealed knowledge’. As prolegomena to the true knowledge, *akousmata* help the student “to lift a burden up” but the labour remains everybody’s personal endeavour. However different in details from Porphyry and Iamblichus, Clement vindicates the fame of the old sage, although the highest knowledge (*gnosis*) revealed to the initiate has nothing to do with the irrationality in mathematics and the “mysteries of the Eleusinian goddesses” are replaced with “the mysteries of *Logos*”.

Biography:

Professor of Philosophy at Novosibirsk State University. He has published two books on Gnosticism (St. Petersburg, 2003 and 2007), a Russian translation of the *Stromateis* by Clement of Alexandria (St. Petersburg, 2003, in 3 vols.), *The Neopythagoreans* (Moderatus, Nicomachus, and Numenius in a Russian translation, Novosibirsk, 2009); he edited (with J. M. Dillon and J. Finamore) *Iamblichus and the Foundation of Late Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).