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The Pythagoreans and the Effects of Musical Instruments between Religion and paideia

The interest of the Early Pythagoreans in musical speculation appears in literary sources as strictly linked with religion and education. The use of paeans for healing and calming both rage and anger among the Pythagoreans (see for instance Iamblichus, *De vita pythagorica* 110; Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagorae* 30) shows that catharsis was meant within such groups as a “purification” from every kind of excess in which religion, medicine and ethics were blended together in order to provide a harmonious order within the individuals.

Music and musical education in Pythagorean communities had also a “political” role, since they were intended to foster social order.

The Pythagoreans exploited in many cases the calming and ennobling effects of the lyre, while on the other hand, according to the Neoplatonic tradition, they seem to have banned the *aulos* from their communities for its disquieting effects.

My aim in this paper is to study the effects of musical instruments on the character of people in sources concerning the Early Pythagoreans beginning from Aristoxenus, who was a main source **both on their way of life and their doctrines**, and moreover very much interested in the effects of the *aulos*. Actually, if on the one hand the Pythagoreans’ preference for the lyre appears linked with the cult of Apollo, which was very prominent in southern-Italian cities where their communities flourished, on the other hand sources also attest to the use of the *aulos* among them (for instance, Iambl. VP 112), and it certainly does not appear odd, if we consider the role of this instrument in religious catharsis.

The difference in the effects of the lyre and the *aulos* may lie in the different attitudes of people listening to them. As for this aspect, a study of the terminology used in sources for the effects of both these instruments turns out to be clarifying.

Biography:

Antonietta Provenza is *Ricercatore in Lingua e Letteratura greca* at the University of Palermo. She obtained her PhD with a dissertation on Music Therapy in Ancient Greece (book forthcoming). She has published several studies on ancient greek music and music therapy, and is currently studying ancient theories on Genetics.