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The Legend of Pythagorean Dietetics

Plato is most probably the earliest author speaking about specifically Pythagorean “way of life” (τρόπος τοῦ βίου), which became a widely discussed topic in later tradition. From the fourth century onwards, issues like Pythagorean vegetarianism, the ban on beans or peculiar dietetic prescriptions for athletes have been commonly interpreted with regard to healthy life and thus gave birth to a legend, according to which Pythagoras and early Pythagoreans paid special attention to dietetics. As we are told by Iamblichus (*Vit. Pyth.* 29,163), they were the first who attempted to employ themselves in dietetic therapy, appreciated it more than other kinds of medicine, and achieved the highest accuracy in this discipline by endeavouring to learn the signs of symmetry between exercises, food and rest. Accordingly, modern scholars often search for the roots of dietetics in Croton at the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries BC, where the Pythagorean movement interacted with the tradition of medicine and athletic training. In contrast to this interpretative tradition, in my paper I aim to demonstrate that dietetics as a specific therapeutic and preventive approach to health has not developed before the middle of the fifth century BC, and that the medical discussion of dietetics, as attested by Hippocratic authors and their contemporaries, influenced the reports on previous Pythagorean tradition rather than the other way round. I shall argue that Iamblichus’s report, the most explicit testimony of Pythagorean dietetics which possibly draws on Aristotle’s pupil Aristoxenus, reflects an idiosyncratic dietetic account presented in the Hippocratic *Regimen*, a fourth century treatise bearing strong traces of “Pythagorean” thoughts (such as the concept of harmony, *mimēsis* or a version of the transmigration theory), which are otherwise alien to the dietetic discussion of the day.

Biography:

I was born in 1973 in Czech Republic, Ph.D. in Philosophy and History of Science received in 2003 from Charles University in Prague. I am interested in the philosophical aspects of ancient Greek medicine and biology. In 2010-2013 I worked as a post-doc research fellow in the project “Medicine of the Mind, Philosophy of the Body” at Humboldt University in Berlin.