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Sayings as ‘Lebenshilfe’: The Reception and Use of Two Pythagorean Collections

JOHAN C. THOM

I. Introduction

As Hellenistic philosophers focused more and more on ethics, they also became correspondingly more aware of the need for moral and spiritual growth, both for themselves and for their students.¹ Consequently, they devised ways of guiding their students toward spiritual maturity, and developed disciplines and practices that would enable a person to continue growing more mature by him- or herself. This system of intellectual, moral, and spiritual care, known as psychagogy (ψυχαγωγία, ‘spiritual guidance’), was well-established in different philosophical traditions by the late Hellenistic and imperial periods.² Psychagogy may be viewed from two perspectives: from the perspective of the teacher-guide, or from that of the recipient, the student.

1 The following paragraph is based on J. C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses*, Leiden 1995, 77–79. See also *id.*, *Popular Philosophy in the Hellenistic-Roman World*, *Early Christianity* 3, 2012, 83 f.

2 The term ψυχαγωγία means “persuasion, winning of men’s souls” in antiquity (see LSJ, s. v., II); the meaning ‘spiritual guidance’ is a neologism. The basic study of psychagogy remains P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung. Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*, München 1954. Other basic studies are I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*, Berlin 1969; *ead.*, *The Spiritual Guide*, in: A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality. Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, New York 1986, 436–459; P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Oxford 1995; *id.*, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge MA 2002. Cf. also A. J. Malherbe, *Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament*, *ANRW II* 26.1, 1992, 267–333, esp. 301–304 = *id.*, *Light from the Gentiles. Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity. Collected Essays, 1959–2012*, edited by C. R. Holladay *et al.*, Leiden 2013, 675–749, esp. 713–717; C. E. Glad, Paul and Philodemus. Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy, Leiden 1995; C. Macris, *Autorità carismatica, direzione spirituale e genere di vita nella tradizione pitagorica*, in: G. Filoramo (a cura), *Storia della direzione spirituale 1. L’età antica*, Brescia 2006, 75–102 = *Charismatic Authority, Spiritual Guidance, and Way of Life in the Pythagorean Tradition*, in: M. Chase, S. R. L. Clark, M. McGhee (ed.), *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns. Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, Malden MA 2013, 57–83.

In the case of the former, the focus is on the teacher's responsibilities, on procedures to be followed in guidance, on considerations to be kept in mind so as not to discourage the student, on the potential assistance given by fellow-students, and so forth.³ In the case of the student, psychagogy has to do with the principles the student has to internalize and apply in his or her life, and the various practices and exercises he or she has to perform to mature morally and spiritually. Such exercises include memorizing precepts in order to be able to apply them when the need arises, meditation, predeliberation, and self-examination. To assist students in their growth, the teacher or spiritual community provide them with instructive material such as elementary introductions, résumés, and sayings. Although the process is set into motion by a teacher-guide, the student is expected to continue on his own, using the exercises and texts provided by the teacher.

The Pythagorean practice of collecting and using various kinds of sayings may perhaps be traced back to Pythagoras himself. According to Heraclitus 22 B 129 D.-K., Pythagoras practised a form of enquiry which included collecting material from which he created his own wisdom. There seems to be a broad consensus in recent scholarship that this material refers to the Pythagorean sayings known as *akousmata* or *symbola*.⁴ The early Pythagoreans were also known for their interpretation and use of sayings taken from Homer and Hesiod.⁵

In this essay I do not however want to consider the Pythagorean tradition as such, but rather focus on the way two Pythagorean sayings collections were used in the later period. These two collections, namely the *Golden Verses* and the *akousmata*, were not the only Pythagorean sayings collections in existence in Late Antiquity – others are the so-called *Pythagorean Sayings*, the *Sentences of Clitarchus*, and the *Sentences of Sextus*⁶ – but the two collections I want to discuss had a broad appeal and an interesting reception history. They are however also very different from one another.

3 Cf., e.g., the discussion in Phld. *Lib.*; see on this also the brief summary by Hadot, *Spiritual Guide* (as in note 2) 455.

4 See J. C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Akousmata and Early Pythagoreanism*, in: G. Cornelli, R. McKirahan, C. Macris (ed.), *On Pythagoreanism* (*Studia Praesocratica* 5), Berlin 2013, 77–101 with the literature cited there.

5 See M. Detienne, *Homère, Hésiode et Pythagore. Poésie et philosophie dans le pythagorisme ancien* (*Collection Latomus* 57), Bruxelles-Berchem 1962.

6 See H. Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus. A Contribution to the History of Early Christian Ethics* (*Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*), Cambridge 1959; W. T. Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus* (*Wisdom Literature from the Ancient World* 1), Atlanta 2012; D. Pevarello, *The Sentences of Sextus and the Origins of Christian Asceticism* (*Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 78), Tübingen 2013.

II. Introduction to the *Golden Verses*

The *Golden Verses* (χρυσᾶ ἔπη = *Carmen Aureum*) is a poem in epic verse consisting of 71 lines.⁷ Scholarly opinion regarding its date of composition varies from the Hellenistic to the early Imperial period,⁸ but it is obvious that older sayings material is included in this composition, even if its precise origin is uncertain. Attempts to trace this material back to a putative *hieros logos* have proved unconvincing.⁹

Despite appearances, the present poem is much more than a mere compilation of earlier verses.¹⁰ Its composition exhibits a definite development with an unmistakable psychagogic purpose.¹¹

The first part of the poem (GV 1–44) contains precepts to be mastered and practised. These precepts and sententiae are roughly grouped around thematic clusters based on *topoi* such as *eusebeia* (GV 1–4); friendship (GV 5–8); the cardinal virtues *sophrosyne* (GV 9–12), justice (GV 13), *phronesis* (GV 14–16), and courage (GV 17–20); and the power of speech (GV 21–26); as well as psychagogic practices such as deliberation before action (GV 27–39) and reflection and self-examination (GV 40–44). This is followed by a transitional section containing an exhortation to practice the precepts, a promise that this will lead to virtue, and an affirmation based on the Pythagorean oath (GV 45–49a).

The second part of the poem (GV 49b–71) indicates the ultimate goals and benefits of the prescribed way of life. This part is considerably more

7 For the text, translation, and commentary see Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1). The abbreviation GV will be used to refer to lines in the poem.

8 I have argued for a dating in the late 4th or early 3rd cent. BC (*Golden Verses* [as in note 1] 35–58; Cleanthes, Chrysippus and the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, *Acta Classica* 44, 2001, 197–219), but other scholars prefer a later date; cf. e.g. A. Dihle, *Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, London–New York 1994, 82: “...Pythagorean circles of the first or second century AD created a didactic poem whose argument was almost exclusively made up of sententias. This *Golden Poem* was widely read and frequently commented on.”

9 For such attempts see A. Delatte, *Études sur la littérature pythagoricienne* (Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études 217), Paris 1915, 3–79; R. Baumgarten, *Heiliges Wort und Heilige Schrift bei den Griechen. Hieroi Logoi und verwandte Erscheinungen* (*ScriptOralia* 110, Reihe A), Tübingen 1998. For criticism of such attempts see Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 56 f.

10 Contra e.g. A. Nauck, *Über die goldenen Sprüche des Pythagoras*, *Bulletin de l’Académie des Sciences de Saint-Petersbourg* 18, 1873, 472–501; id., *Epimetrum de Pythagorae aureo carmine*, in: A. Nauck (ed.), *Iamblichi De vita Pythagorica liber*, 1884, repr. Amsterdam 1965, 201–242.

11 For a detailed discussion of the composition see Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 59–65.

complex than the first, because it simply alludes to insights to be gained and more advanced doctrines without explaining them. Such knowledge include insight into the relationship between gods and humans (GV 50–51), into nature (GV 52–53), and into the cause of suffering (GV 54–60). It also refers to knowing one’s personal *daimon* (GV 61–62), the divine origin of humanity, and the mysteries of nature (GV 63–64). The concluding section (GV 65–71) contains final promises and commands. It alludes to two other texts of this community and indicates that the ultimate goal of this way of life is an immortal and divine existence in the afterlife.

The importance of internalizing and practising the precepts are emphasized throughout by the repetition of verbs meaning ‘knowing,’ ‘learning,’ and ‘thinking’ (GV 9, 15, 27, 30, 39, 45, 50, 52, 54), ‘mastering’ (GV 9, 49, 65), ‘practising’ (GV 13), ‘accustoming’ (GV 14, 35), ‘doing,’ ‘accomplishing,’ and ‘labouring’ (GV 11, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 34, 36, 39, 42, 44, 45, 48). We also find an emphasis on a dispositional equilibrium by not becoming upset or overwhelmed by what happens (GV 7, 18, 22–23, 24), and by remaining positive (GV 63).

As we have seen, the composition refers to two specific psychagogic exercises. The first entails *predeliberation*, that is, to think about an action and its possible consequences before performing it.¹² This section is neatly demarcated by means of an *inclusio* in GV 27 and 39. Predeliberation requires that one should learn about what is involved in an action in order to understand it. What should be avoided are actions leading to negative consequences such as foolishness, ill health, envy, or anything else that may cause one distress. The aim is to live a pure and enjoyable life. Although the *Golden Verses* does not make this explicit, the exercise may refer to the Pythagorean practice of reviewing everything that will be done that day each morning upon waking up.¹³ The principle of predeliberation is characteristic of wisdom literature in general¹⁴ and its practice formed an integral part of the rationalization of

12 For a detailed commentary see Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 154–163.

13 Cf. Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 40; also Diod. Sic. 10,5,1; Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 165 (although they refer to memory training); 256. For a similar Stoic exercise see Epict. *Diss.* 4,6,33.

14 Cf. Cleobulus apud D. L. 1,92: καὶ ὅταν τις ἐξῆι τῆς οἰκίας, ζητεῖτω πρότερον τί μέλλει πράσσειν· καὶ ὅταν εἰσέλθῃ πάλιν, ζητεῖτω τί ἔπραξε; Democr. 68 B 66 D.-K.: προβουλευέσθαι κρεῖσσον πρὸ τῶν πράξεων ἢ μετανοεῖν; Men. *Mon.* 111: βουλὴν ἅπαντος πράγματος προλάμβανε; Clitarch. *Sent.* 16: σκέπτου πρὸ τοῦ πράττειν καὶ ἂ πράττεις ἐξετάζε, ἵνα μὴδὲν ποιῆς ὃ μὴ δεῖ (cf. also Sext. *Sent.* 93); Ps.-Pyth. *Sent.* 12: βουλευσάμενος πολλὰ ἤκε ἐπὶ τὸ λέγειν ἢ πράττειν· οὐ γὰρ ἐξεῖς ἐξουσίαν ἀνακαλέσασθαι τὰ πραχθέντα ἢ λεχθέντα (cf. Clitarch. *Sent.* 128); LXX *Sir.* 32:19: ἄνευ βουλῆς μὴθὲν ποιήσης καὶ ἐν τῷ ποιῆσαι σε μὴ μεταμελοῦ (cf. also 37:16); *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* 8,4: “Do not do a thing that you have not first examined” trans. M. Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context. A Study of Demotic Instructions* (OBO 52), Göttingen 1983, 66–92. Cf. also the two parables in *Luke* 14:28–33.

one’s life preached by most Hellenistic philosophers.¹⁵ The ultimate goal was a quiet life, a life devoid of pain and disturbance, a life characterized by ἀταραξία.¹⁶ For this reason, the ‘most enjoyable life’ (GV 31) is here also defined negatively: it is a life unmarred by self-afflicted grief (cf. GV 29b, 34c, 39b).¹⁷

The second exercise is that of *self-examination* at the end of the day before going to sleep (GV 40–44).¹⁸ It entails three steps, namely, (a) recollection of everything done during the day; (b) evaluation and classification of the deeds into one of three categories (errors of commission, accomplishments, and errors of omission); and (c) self-blame and self-praise. Self-examination forms in many respects the culmination of the psychagogic process, since the individual is here directly confronted with him- or herself, with his or her own shortcomings or spiritual potential. It is, in any case, the *sine qua non* for any progress in virtue.¹⁹ It is quite probable that the practice originated with the Pythagoreans, although it was also practised by Epicureans and Stoics, as well as by more eclectic philosophers.²⁰

The general psychagogic objectives of the *Golden Verses* should now be clear.²¹ The first part of the poem contains the basic moral principles the student had to master, while the second part encourages the student to persevere by indicating the benefits to be obtained by this way of life. Mastering and practice of, as well as meditation on the precepts contained in the *Golden Verses* are repeatedly emphasized (cf. GV 9, 13, 14, 35, 45, 48, 49, 65). Predeliberation and self-evaluation form the heart of the poem’s moral teach-

15 Cf. e.g. Epict. *Ench.* 29. See further Rabbow (as in note 2) 148 f.; Hadot, *Spiritual Guide* (as in note 2) 454.

16 See on this P. Wilpert, *Ataraxie*, in: RAC 1, Stuttgart 1950, 844–854, esp. 844: “Worin besteht das Glück? Die griech. Frühzeit dachte vor allem an die äußeren Güter, deren Inbegriff der ὄλβος ist. Aber bald erkannte man, daß die Wurzeln des Glücks in der eigenen Seele liegen. Worin anders dürfen wir dann das Glück suchen als in einem Zustand gleichmäßiger, unerschütterlicher Ruhe? Seit Demokrit ist die griech. Ethik darin einig.”

17 Cf. also *Vit. Aesop.* (W) 110, p. 102,12 Perry: πράσσε τὰ μὴ λυποῦντά σε.

18 Commentary in Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 163–167.

19 Cf. Epicur. apud Sen. *Epist.* 28,9 (= fr. 522 Usener): *Initium est salutis notitia peccati* (“Awareness of an error is the beginning of salvation”).

20 See on this practice L. Schmidt, *Die Ethik der alten Griechen*, Berlin 1882, 2,394 f.; Rabbow (as in note 2) 180–188; U. Moricca, *L’esame di coscienza e la storia d’un precetto pitagorico*, *Il mondo classico* 10, 1940, 221–244; P. Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard*, Paris 1974, 1,50–53; Hadot, *Seelenleitung* (as in note 2) 66–71; ead., *Spiritual Guide* (as in note 2) 453 f.; H. Chadwick, *Gewissen*, in: RAC 10, Stuttgart 1978, 1056 f.; Hadot, *Spiritual Exercises* (as in note 2) 22 f. According to R. Mondolfo, *La filosofia dei Greci nel suo sviluppo storico*, Firenze 1950, parte prima, vol. II, 578–580 this practice was one of the most important Pythagorean contributions to the history of ethics.

21 See Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 79.

ing (GV 27–44); these exercises both serve to create an awareness of the implications and consequences of one's actions, that is, they contribute to the rationalization of one's life, so that the whole of life should be under conscious control.²² Such a rational, deliberate way of life is seen as prerequisite for understanding one's position within nature and eventually to become assimilated to the divine.²³

III. The Reception and Use of the *Golden Verses*

The *Golden Verses*, or at least verses contained in it, was well-known in the early Imperial period and Late Antiquity among both pagan and Christian authors.²⁴ Leaving aside references to the Pythagorean oath, which also circulated separately, there are allusions to the poem, or verses quoted from it, by Plutarch (ca. AD 45–120), Epictetus (ca. AD 55–135), Galen (AD 129–199), Aulus Gellius (2d century AD), Alciphron (2d/3d century AD), Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–ca. 215), Origen (AD 185–253), Porphyry (AD 234–301/4), Diogenes Laertius (end 3d century AD?), Iamblichus (ca. AD 240–325), Ausonius (AD 310–94), Themistius (AD ca. 317–88), Methodius (early 4th century AD), Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329/30–390/91), Jerome (AD 345–419), Calcidius (fl. ca. AD 400), Stobaeus (early 5th century AD), Proclus (AD 412–85), Ammonius (fl. ca. AD 550), Simplicius (early 6th century AD), Elias (6th century AD), David (6th century AD), Hesychius (6th century AD), Arethas (ca. AD 860–940), and the *Suda* (10th century AD).²⁵ Such quotations and allusions refer to verses from all parts of the poem.

22 Cf. Hadot, *Seelenleitung* (as in note 2) 68: “Das Ziel einer solchen doppelten Übung ist wohl ohne weiteres ersichtlich: Es wurde ein Äußerstes an Aufmerksamkeit und Bewußtheit erstrebt, kein Augenblick des täglichen Leben sollte ohne rationale Kontrolle vorübergehen, und darüber hinaus sollte der Vergleich zwischen Geplantem und Erreichtem die Prüfung des sittlichen Fortschritts ermöglichen.”

23 See on the psychagogy of the *Golden Verses* also Macris, *Charismatic Authority* (as in note 2) 73–75.

24 For a more detailed discussion see Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 13–26.

25 Sen. *Dial.* 5,36,1–4; Plut. *Consol. ad Apoll.* 29 116 E [GV 17–18], *Superst.* 7, 168 B [GV 42], *Curios.* 1.515 F [GV 42], fr. 86 Sandbach [GV 7–8]; Ps.-Plut. *Vit. Hom.* 153 [GV 17–18]; Epict. *Diss.* 3,10,2 f. [GV 40–44], 4,6,32–35. [GV 40, 42]; Gal. *Affect. dignot.* 5,10 [GV 12], 6,10 [GV 40–44 or whole poem]; Gell. 7,2 = SVF 2,1000 [GV 54]; Theano *Ep. Pyth.* 7,5 [GV 38]; Alciphr. 3,19,7 Schepers [GV title]; Clem. *Paed.* 1,94,1 [GV 44]; Orig. fr. *In Ps.* 4:5 [GV 42]; Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 40 [GV 40–42]; Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 144 [GV 1–2], *Protr.* 3, p. 10–16 [GV 45–71]; Iambl. Arab. *In CA* [GV 1–71]; D. L. 8,22 [GV 42]; Ausonius 363,14–26 [GV 40–44]; Them. *Or.* 13 175a [GV 42]; Methodius *Symp.* 6,5,147 [GV 47]; Greg. Naz. *Or.* 4,102,6 f. [GV title]; Hier. *Adv. Rufin.* 3,39,27–32

In addition to these testimonia, there are four extant commentaries on the poem, the first a partial commentary by Iamblichus in his *Protrepticus* (ch. 3),²⁶ the second by Hierocles of Alexandria (early 5th century AD),²⁷ and two extant in Arabic only, one attributed to Iamblichus,²⁸ and another to a certain ‘Proclus’, who may perhaps be identified as Proclus Procleius who took part in the pagan revival under the emperor Julian in the 4th century.²⁹ From these commentaries and testimonia a clear picture emerges of how the *Golden Verses* and the sayings it contains were used in the psychagogy of the period. Here I will only discuss a few pertinent examples.

Galen in his work *On the Diagnosis and Cure of the Passions in One’s Soul* (Περὶ διαγνώσεως καὶ θεραπειᾶς τῶν ἐν (τῇ) ἐκάστου ψυχῆ ἰδίων παθῶν) gives advice on how to master passions like anger (esp. *Affect. dignot.* 4,5–6,11). One should, among other things, consider beforehand what one has to do each day and not be swept along by passions and desires like anger,

- [GV title]; Procl. Arab. *In CA* [GV 1–71]; Calc. *In Tim.* 136 [GV 70–71]; Hierocl. *In CA* [GV 1–71]; Stob. 3,1,11 [GV 9–16], 3,3,21 [GV 21–26, 39], 3,15,7 [GV 37–38], 3,24,2 [GV 12], 4,25,11 [GV 4], 4,37,1 [GV 32–35], 4,44,17 [GV 17–18]; Procl. *In Tim.* 1,203,24–27 [GV 1–2], 2,53,5–7 Diehl [GV 47–48]; Ammon. *In Porph. Isag.* p. 15,17–16,3 Busse [GV 9–10, 40–44]; Simpl. *In Epict.* 2, p. 85 [GV 60]; 30, p. 328 [GV 7–8]; Elias *In Porph. Isag.* 12, p. 34,10–12, 16–21 Busse [GV 12, 40–42, 44]; David, *Proleg.* 8, p. 26,6–8 Busse [GV title]; 15, p. 48,24–28 Busse [GV 47–48]; Hsch. apud *Suda* s.v. Πρόκλος (Π 2472), IV,210 Adler [GV title]; Arethas, *Scripta min.* 40,2–4 [GV 7]; *Suda* s.v. Πυθαγόρας (Π 3120), IV,263 Adler [GV title].
- 26 Text edition by H. Pistelli, *Iamblichi Protrepticus ad fidem codicis Florentini*, 1888 (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), repr. Stuttgart 1967; German translation by O. Schönberger, *Iamblichos. Aufruf zur Philosophie*, Würzburg 1984.
- 27 Text edition by F. W. Koehler, *Hieroclis in aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius* (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum), Stuttgart 1974; introduction, translation, and notes by H. S. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria*, Oxford 2002.
- 28 Introduction, text and translation by H. Daiber, *Neuplatonische Pythagorica in arabischem Gewande. Der Kommentar des Iamblichus zu den Carmina aurea. Ein verlorener griechischer Text in arabischer Überlieferung* (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Verhandelingen, Afd. Letterkunde, N. R. 161), Amsterdam 1995.
- 29 Introduction, text and translation by N. Linley, *Ibn at-Ṭayyib. Proclus’ Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses* (Arethusa Monographs 10), Buffalo 1984. For the author and date see L. G. Westerink, *Proclus commentateur des Vers d’Or*, in: G. Boss, G. Seel (éd.) *Proclus et son influence. Actes du colloque de Neuchâtel, 20–23 juin 1985*, Zürich 1987, 61–78. For a discussion of the commentaries see Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 17–26. I have unfortunately not been able to read the article by A. Izdebska, *Arabskie wersje późnoantycznych komentarzy do pitagorejskiego Złotego Poematu*, *U schyłku starożytności, Studia źródłoznawcze* 11, 2012, 7–54. According to the English summary, the author argues that the Arabic commentary attributed to Iamblichus was written by “an author who did not have access to the Greek text of the poem and must have composed his text in Arabic.” The commentary attributed to Proclus, on the other hand, “seems to be a real translation of the Greek text, its authorship can tentatively be attributed to Proclus or another late antique Platonist.”

sex, gluttony, drunkenness, and “unnatural shameless conduct” (*Affect. dignot.* 5,6; 6,7; 6,9), and one should consult people older and more experienced than oneself in determining one’s faults (6,10). He then continues:

εἶτα [sc. γρη] <ταῦτα> καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν αὐτὸν ἀναμιμνήσκειν, ἄμεινον μὲν πολλάκις, εἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλὰ πάντως γε κατὰ τὴν ἑω, πρὶν ἄρχεσθαι τῶν πράξεων, εἰς ἑσπέραν δέ, πρὶν ἀναπαύσεσθαι μέλλειν. ἐγὼ δὴπου καὶ ταύτας δὴ τὰς φερομένας ὡς Πυθαγόρου παραινέσεις εἶθισμαι δις τῆς ἡμέρας ἀναγινώσκειν μὲν τὰ πρῶτα, λέγειν δ’ ἀπὸ στόματος ὕστερον.

Furthermore, one should remind oneself of these things each day. It would be better to do this many times, but otherwise at least in the morning, before starting with your business, and in the evening, before going to rest. I in any case am accustomed to review those exhortations circulating in Pythagoras’ name twice during the day: to read them first, and then to repeat them from memory later (*Affect. dignot.* 6,10).

Galen’s practice is very similar to that described by Hierocles of Alexandria. According to him,

διὸ καὶ νόμος ἦν ἕωθεν τε ἀνισταμένους αὐτοὺς ἀκροᾶσθαι τούτων τῶν ἐπῶν ὡσπερὶ τινῶν Πυθαγορικῶν θεσμῶν ἐνός τινος ὑπαναγινώσκοντος καὶ πρὸς ἑσπέραν εἰς ὕπνον μέλλοντας τρέπεσθαι, ὅπως ἂν τῇ συνεχείᾳ τῆς μελέτης τῶν τοιούτων λόγων ζῶντα ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀποφίησιν τὰ δόγματα· ὃ δὴ καὶ ἡμᾶς ποιεῖν δίκαιον πρὸς τὸ συναίσθησιν τῆς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὠφελείας ὅψε γοῦν ποτε κτήσασθαι.

it was ... [a Pythagorean] custom both upon rising in the morning to listen to these verses [sc. the *Golden Verses*] just as though to Pythagorean precepts, when one of them would recite them aloud, and also in the evening before going to sleep, so that by the continual engagement with such texts they might show forth that the doctrines were living in them. It is surely right that we do so as well, in order that after some time we may come to perceive the benefit they bring us (*In CA 27,12*, p. 122,9–16; trans. Schibli).

Alciphron (2d/3d cent. AD) gives a satirical description of a dinner party with philosophers from different schools during which “the famous Archibius, the Pythagorean,” “breaking his silence, hummed some of the *Golden Verses* to a musical air.”³⁰ Towards the end of Antiquity Elias (6th cent. AD) indicates that they are used to chant (ἐπάδειν) verses from the poem to themselves.³¹ All these testimonia demonstrate that the *Golden Verses* were stud-

30 Alciphr. 3,19,7 Schepers: ὁ Πυθαγόρειος δὲ τὴν σιωπὴν λύσας τῶν χρυσῶν ἐπῶν τινα κατὰ μουσικὴν ἁρμονίαν ἑτερέτιζεν.

31 ὡς ἡνίκα ἐπάδωμεν ἑαυτοῖς τὰ τῶ ὄντι χρυσᾶ ἔπη Πυθαγόρου (*In Porph. Isag.* 12, p. 34 Busse).

ied and memorized, so that lines could be cited at will as the occasion demanded. Epictetus explicitly states that one should have these verses at hand (πρόχειρον), in order to be able to use the right doctrine at the right occasion, and not only to recite them.³²

The section from the *Golden Verses* most frequently used in this regard is the passage on self-examination (vv. 40–44). Seneca describes this practise in legal terms, as an interrogation before the judge of the self in which the whole day is thoroughly examined:

[animus] cotidie ad rationem reddendam uocandus est. Faciebat hoc Sextius, ut consummato die, cum se ad nocturnam quietem recepisset, interrogaret animum suum: ‘quod hodie malum tuum sanasti? Cui uitio obstitisti? Qua parte melior es?’ Desinet ira et moderator erit quae sciet sibi cotidie ad iudicem esse ueniendum. Quicquam ergo pulchrius hac consuetudine excutiendi totum diem? Qualis ille somnus post recognitionem sui sequitur, quam tranquillius, quam altus ac liber, cum aut laudatus est animus aut admonitus et speculator sui censorque secretus cognouit de moribus suis! Vtor hac potestate et cotidie apud me causam dico. Cum sublatum e conspectu lumen est..., totum diem meum scrutor factaque ac dicta mea remetior; nihil mihi ipse abscondo, nihil transeo.

The mind ... should be summoned to give an account of itself every day. Sextius had this habit, and when the day was over and he had retired to his nightly rest, he would put these questions to his soul: “What bad habit have you cured today? What fault have you resisted? In what respect are you better?” ... Can anything be more excellent than this practice of thoroughly sifting the whole day? And how delightful the sleep that follows this self-examination – how tranquil it is, how deep and untroubled, when the soul has either praised or admonished itself, and when this secret examiner and critic of self has given report of its own character! I avail myself of this privilege, and every day I plead my cause before the bar of self. When the light has been removed from sight, ... I scan the whole of my day and retrace all my deeds and words. I conceal nothing from myself, I omit nothing (*Dial.* 5,36,1–3; trans. J. W. Basore, LCL).

This self-examination leads to a peaceful and untroubled sleep.

32 *Diss.* 3,10,1–4: Ἐκάστου δόγματος ὅταν ἡ χρεία παρῆ, πρόχειρον αὐτὸ ἔχειν δεῖ· ἐπ’ ἀρίστω τὰ περὶ ἀρίστου, ἐν βαλανείῳ τὰ περὶ βαλανείου, ἐν κοίτῃ τὰ περὶ κοίτης. [He then quotes GV 40–44] καὶ τούτους τοὺς στίχους κατέχειν χρηστικῶς, οὐχ ἵνα δι’ αὐτῶν ἀναφανῶμεν, ὡς διὰ τοῦ Παιῶν Ἀπολλων.

In later authors such as Ammonius and Elias GV 40–44 are also considered an exercise of judgement (δικάζειν) that has to be applied to oneself, while they also quote GV 9–10 as an example of a law that one lays down (νομοθετεῖν) for oneself.³³ Plutarch cites GV 42 as an example of introspection (*Superst.* 7, 168 B; *Curios.* 1, 515 F), while Clement of Alexandria quotes GV 44 as a precept in support of his thesis that both praise and blame may be used in elementary instruction (*Paed.* 1,94,1).

Iamblichus of Chalcis devotes the third chapter of his *Protrepticus* (about six pages in the Teubner edition) to the *Golden Verses*.³⁴ This work by Iamblichus is the second book of a multivolume work entitled *On Pythagoreanism* (Περὶ τῆς Πυθαγορικῆς αἰρέσεως), in which Iamblichus lays out the basic elements of his Pythagoreanizing philosophical program.³⁵ The *Protrepticus* contains a progressive protreptic

accomplished ... in three stages: a protreptic to philosophy in general, not restricted to a specific system (chapters 2–3); an intermediate protreptic mixing in the general with the Pythagorean (chapters 4–20); a final protreptic to the technical demonstrations of the Pythagoreans (chapter 21).³⁶

It is significant that the *Golden Verses* is used to illustrate the first stage, which implies that Iamblichus considered the poem a suitable text for novices and uninitiated readers. By way of contrast, the more enigmatic and esoteric Pythagorean sayings known as σύμβολα or ἀκούσματα are used in the final stage of protreptic.

Iamblichus does not discuss the whole poem, but only the final section, namely, GV 45–71 (with the exception of GV 47–49a, 57, and 64–68), as an example of “protreptic sayings in verse form, able to exhort to the best and most divine philosophy.”³⁷ The method of exhortation based on such sayings “evokes a love and eagerness for what is beautiful, ... it leads to a cultivation of not just any virtue, but one which removes us from human nature and leads to divine being, the knowledge of divine virtue and its attainment.”³⁸

33 Ammon. *In Porph. Isag.* p. 15 f. Busse; Elias *In Porph. Isag.* 12, p. 34 Busse.

34 See for the following Thom, *Golden Verses* (as in note 1) 17–21.

35 See D. J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived. Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1989. O’Meara gives an extensive discussion of Iamblichus’ *On Pythagoreanism* (p. 30–105). See now also D. J. O’Meara, *Iamblichus’ On the Pythagorean Life in Context*, in: C. A. Huffman (ed.), *A History of Pythagoreanism*, Cambridge 2014, 400–403.

36 O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* (as in note 35) 40–44; quotation from p. 41.

37 γνῶμαι προτρεπτικαὶ ἔμμετροι, εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ θειοτάτην φιλοσοφίαν παρακαλεῖν δυνάμεναι, *Protr.* summ. Γ.

38 εἰς ἔρωτά τε καὶ προθυμίαν τῶν καλῶν διεγείρων, καὶ πάντα ταῦτα ἀνάγων εἰς τὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐπιτήδευσιν οὐχ ἀπλῶς τῆς τυχούσης, ἀλλ’ ἥτις ἡμᾶς ἀφίστησι μὲν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως, ἐπὶ δὲ τὴν θεῖαν οὐσίαν καὶ τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς θείας ἀρετῆς καὶ τὴν κτήσιν αὐτῆς περιάγει; *Protr.* 3,

Hierocles of Alexandria devotes a full-length commentary to the poem (122 pages in the Teubner edition).³⁹ He values the *Golden Verses* very highly, describing it at the end of his commentary as

οὐδὲν ἄλλο τὰ ἔπη ταῦτα ἢ τελειότατος χαρακτήρ φιλοσοφίας καὶ τῶν κεφαλαιωδεστέρων αὐτῆς δογμάτων ἐπιτομὴ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἤδη τὴν θεῖαν οἶμον ἀναβεβηκότων ἀπογραφεῖσα τοῖς μετ’ αὐτοὺς παιδευτικῆ στοιχειώσις, ἃ δὴ καὶ τῷ ὄντι εἴποις ἂν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης εὐγενείας εἶναι γνῶρισμα κάλλιστον καὶ οὐχ ἑνός τινος τῶν Πυθαγορείων ἀπομνημόνευμα, ὅλου δὲ τοῦ ἱεροῦ συλλόγου καί, ὡς ἂν αὐτοὶ εἴποιεν, τοῦ ὁμαῖου παντὸς ἀπόφθεγμα κοινόν.

nothing but the most complete expression of philosophy, a summary of its more important doctrines, an elementary teaching written down by those who have already advanced on the divine way for those coming after. One may indeed also truly call it the most beautiful token of human nobility and a memorial of not one specific Pythagorean, but of the whole saintly assembly, and as they themselves would say, a joint apothegm of the school as a whole (Hierocl. *In CA* 27,11; my translation).

According to Hierocles, the *Golden Verses* provides us with “briefly defined rules” (κανόνες τιὰς ἔχειν ἐν βραχεῖ διωρισμένους οἶον ἀφορισμούς τινας τεχνικούς) which we may use to acquire virtue and truth (ἀρετὴ καὶ ἀλήθεια), that is, both practical and contemplative philosophy (φιλοσοφίας πρακτικῆς τε καὶ θεωρητικῆς).⁴⁰ “The aim and arrangement of the verses [in the curriculum] is ... to impress upon the students a philosophic character before they continue to the other courses” (*In CA* prooem. 4).⁴¹ It is therefore probable that Hierocles’ own teaching commenced with an interpretation of the *Golden Verses*.⁴²

p. 10,24–11,4. Cf. also *ibid.* p. 16,7–10: πέφηνεν ἄρα καὶ ἡ τῶν τοιούτων παρακλήσεων μέθοδος εἰς ὅλα τὰ γένη τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πρὸς πάντα τὰ εἶδη τῆς βελτίονος ζωῆς ἡμᾶς προτρέπουσα.

39 Köhler (as in note 27). Köhler also translated the text into German: Hierokles: Kommentar zum pythagoreischen Goldenen Gedicht (Griechische und lateinische Schriftsteller), Stuttgart 1983. There is now also an English translation by Schibli (as in note 27).

40 *In CA* prooem. 1 f.

41 οὗτος μὲν ὁ σκοπὸς τῶν ἐπῶν καὶ ἡ τάξις, χαρακτῆρα φιλόσοφον πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀναγνωσμάτων ἐνθεῖναι τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς.

42 See L. G. Westerink, Hierokles II (Neuplatoniker), in: RAC 15, Stuttgart 1991, 110; *id.*, Proclus (as in note 29) 72. Cf. also I. Hadot, Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin. Hiéroclès et Simplicius, Paris 1978, 162.

IV. Introduction to the *Akousmata*

The Pythagorean collection consisting of *akousmata* differs in several important respects from the *Golden Verses*.⁴³

In the first place, there is no definitive collection of the *akousmata*. We find a wide range of forms and topics amongst these sayings, which makes it difficult to compile a comprehensive list. Some have a catechism-like form with questions and answers, others are commands or prohibitions, while still others are statements. Some *akousmata* have to do with ritual and cult, some with dietary matters, some with the sciences; some are concerned with cosmology and myth, others with moral issues. This diversity makes it difficult to give a precise description or definition of what an *akousma* was, which means that we have to rely on ancient authors' identification of particular sayings as *akousmata*. About seventy sayings are explicitly cited as *akousmata*, or by the synonymous terms *symbola* and *ainigmata*, but as many sayings may probably be included in the list on the basis of their similarity in form and content, or their proximity to known *akousmata* in ancient texts.⁴⁴

Secondly, since the *akousmata* are cited individually, or in small clusters, the very notion of a *collection* of *akousmata* with a specific function or purpose is somewhat uncertain. The suggestion that the *akousmata* functioned as a collection was first advanced by the Belgian scholar Armand Delatte in an extensive essay titled 'Le catéchisme des acousmatiques'.⁴⁵ Because many *akousmata* have a question-and-answer format, he proposed that the *akousmata* formed an early Pythagorean catechism which introduced students to the religious and moral doctrines of the Pythagorean movement.⁴⁶ Although the genre of a catechism is anachronistic, many subsequent scholars, notably Walter Burkert, accepted the suggestion that the *akousmata* collection com-

43 The following description is based on Thom, *Akousmata* (as in note 4) 77–83.

44 Between them, F. Boehm, *De symbolis Pythagoreis*, Diss. Berlin 1905; Delatte, *Études* (as in note 9) 271–312, and W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, Cambridge MA 1972, 166–192 have extended our collection to about 120 *akousmata*, but none of them has exactly the same collection. In addition to the sayings from the first two types (see below), L. Zhmud, *Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Religion im frühen Pythagoreismus (Antike in der Moderne)*, Berlin 1997, 98 refers to “beinahe hundert ‘pythagoreischer’ Tabus.” A. Hüffmeier, *Die pythagoreischen Sprüche in Porphyrios’ Vita Pythagorae* Kapitel 36 (Ende) bis 45. Einführung, Übersetzung, Parallelen und Kommentar, Diss. Münster 2001, 38–41 suggests that the list of *akousmata* can easily be expanded to c. 200.

45 Delatte, *Études* (as in note 9) 271–312.

46 The suggestion regarding a catechism is accepted by e.g. G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers. A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, Cambridge 21983, 229.

pletely determined the worldview and especially the way of life of the early Pythagoreans.⁴⁷

Collections of the *akousmata* must have begun to circulate and become available to non-Pythagoreans sometime during the fifth century, since commentaries on the sayings make their appearance from the end of the century.⁴⁸ The first known commentary is a work by Anaximander the Younger of Miletus from c. 400 BC titled *An Explanation of Pythagorean Symbola* (Συμβόλων Πυθαγορείων ἐξηγήσις).⁴⁹ Aristotle (384–322 BC), too, had access to such collections, which he discussed in his now lost works *On the Pythagoreans*.⁵⁰ He is our most important early source on the *akousmata*, and we will return to him in a moment. A work by Androcydes, called *On the Pythagorean Symbola* (Περὶ Πυθαγορικῶν συμβόλων), may have been in existence in the fourth century, but was probably known by the first century BC.⁵¹ Alexander Polyhistor (c. 110–c. 40 BC) also wrote a book *On the*

47 Burkert’s position is described in more detail below.

48 T. Viték, ‘The Origins of the Pythagorean ‘Symbola’’, *La parola del passato* 64, 2009, 265–268, on the other hand, suggests that the first collection of *akousmata* was only published in the mid-4th century BC in the circle of pupils of Aristotle, probably by Aristoxenus. This view is unnecessarily critical.

49 *Suda*, s.v. Ἀναξίμανδρος, α 1987, I,179 = FGrH 9 T 1 = 58 C 6 D.-K. For the identity and date of Anaximander, see E. Schwartz, *Art. Anaximandros* 2, in: *RE* I.2, Stuttgart 1894, 2085 f.; Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 166 n. 2. According to J. A. Philip, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Phoenix Supplementary Volume 7), Toronto 1966, 148 n. 3, Anaximander must be dated to the earliest part of Artaxerxes Memnon’s reign (405–359 BC).

50 Our sources refer to at least two such works, *On the Pythagoreans* and *Against the Pythagoreans*, but it is not possible to assign individual fragments to one or the other. Fragments of these (two) works have been collected by V. Rose (ed.), *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta*, ³1886 (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), repr. Stuttgart 1966, fr. 190–205, and to a large extent repr. by W. D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotelis fragmenta selecta* (Scriptorium Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis), Oxford 1955, 129–143, fr. 1–17. The most recent edition is by O. Gigon (ed.), *Aristotelis opera*, vol. 3, *Librorum deperditorum fragmenta*, Berlin–New York ²1987, 408–419.

51 Androcydes has been identified with a 4th-century physician by P. Corssen, *Die Schrift des Arztes Androkydes Περὶ Πυθαγορικῶν συμβόλων*, *Rheinisches Museum* n.s. 67, 1912, 240–263, but the identification is dubious; see Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 167; B. Centrone, *Androcyde* (A 173), in: R. Goulet (éd.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* 1, Paris 1994, 197 f. The earliest citation of Androcydes’s commentary is in Tryphon *Trop.* p. 193 f. Spengel, which may provide a terminus ante quem of the 1st century BC, but scholars differ about whether the latter text is rightfully attributed to Trypho (cf. P. B. R. Forbes and N. G. Wilson, Tryphon [2], in: *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford–New York ³1996, 1557; M. Baumbach, Tryphon [3], in: *Der Neue Pauly* 12/1, Stuttgart 2002, 885), which makes the terminus itself less certain. Androcydes’s commentary is on the other hand probably used by Demetrius of Byzantium (apud. Ath. 10,77) which confirms the 1st-century BC terminus ante quem. The commentary is first cited by name in Ps.-Iamb. *Theol. ar.* p. 52,8 f. de Falco; Iamb. *Vita Pyth.* 145.

Pythagorean Symbola.⁵² The Neoplatonist philosopher, Iamblichus of Chalcis, devotes the final chapter of his *Protrepticus* to a commentary on thirty-nine *akousmata*.⁵³ Here and in his earlier work *On the Pythagorean Life* Iamblichus refers to another book of his *On the Symbola* (Περὶ συμβόλων); this is unfortunately lost or was perhaps never written.⁵⁴ In addition to these commentaries, there are also quotations and discussion of *akousmata* in authors such as Plutarch, Athenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and later authors, all of whom probably depend on one of the earlier collections.⁵⁵

Two basic approaches to the *akousmata* are found in the extant commentaries: the first, attributed to Aristotle, is to explain the *akousmata* as far as possible in terms of cult; the second approach, represented by Androcydes and Iamblichus, interprets the *akousmata* as symbolic utterances with a moral or metaphysical meaning. Scholars have been inclined to view these approaches as mutually exclusive and chronologically sequential: the former, literal interpretation of the sayings derives from early Pythagoreanism, while the latter approach comes from a later, more enlightened period when the literal meanings were no longer intellectually acceptable.⁵⁶ I have however argued elsewhere that non-literal interpretations were already used in the early period.⁵⁷ Be that as it may, it is clear that figurative interpretations were more prominent in the Imperial period.

52 According to Clem. *Strom.* 1,70,1 = FGtH 273 F 94; see C. Hölk, *De acusmatis sive symbolis Pythagoricis*, Diss. Kiel 1894, 20; Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 166 n. 2. Alexander does have a section on the *akousmata* in his excerpts of the *Pythagorean Notes* (Πυθαγορικά ὑπομνήματα) preserved in D. L. 8,24–36 and it may be that Clement is referring to this work. There is still no consensus on the date and sources of the *Pythagorean Notes*. Dates vary from the 4th to the 1st century BC, but a good case has been made for a 3rd century date; see W. Burkert, *Hellenistische Pseudopythagorica*, *Philologus* 105, 1961, 23, 25–27. For a brief survey of scholarly positions see B. Centrone, *L'VIII libro delle 'Vite' di Diogene Laerzio*, ANRW II 36.6, 1992, 4193–4196. See on the *Notes* now also A. Laks, *The Pythagorean Hypomnemata* reported by Alexander Polyhistor in Diogenes Laertius (8,25–33): a proposal for reading, in: G. Cornelli, R. McKirahan, and C. Macris (ed.), *On Pythagoreanism* (*Studia Praesocratica* 5), Berlin–Boston 2013, 371–383.

53 *Iambl. Protr.* 21, p. 104,26–126,6.

54 *Iambl. Vita Pyth.* 186; *Protr.* 21, p. 112,2. Both references are in the future tense; maybe Iamblichus planned such a work, but never wrote it. The evidence for the existence of a work by Iamblichus called Περὶ συμβόλων is discussed by B. Dalsgaard Larsen, *Jamblique de Chalcis. Exégète et philosophe*, Aarhus 1972, 60 f. He also refers to Hieron. *Adv. Rufin.* 3,39. See further J. Dillon, *Iamblichos de Chalcis* (I 3), in: R. Goulet (éd.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* 3, Paris 2000, 834.

55 The history of traditions of the *akousmata* collections has been analyzed by Hölk (as in note 52), but is in need of revision; cf. already the criticism by Delatte, *Études* (as in note 9) 286.

56 See Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 174 f.

57 See Thom, *Akousmata* (as in note 4).

As noted earlier, the sayings included in the collection display a variety of forms and contents. In a passage in Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 82–86 that in all probability derives from Aristotle,⁵⁸ a threefold distinction is made, namely, into *akousmata* expressing what something is, what the highest form of something is, and what must or must not be done.⁵⁹ Although this division may not be original, it will serve as a basic typology of the sayings.

The first type (τί ἐστὶ) comprises ‘definitions’ identifying mythemes or religious items with natural phenomena. Only two examples are given in Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 82 (“What are the Isles of the Blest? Sun and moon (τί ἐστὶν αἱ μακάρων νῆσοι; ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη)”; and “What is the oracle of Delphi? The *tektaktys* [unit of four], which is the harmony in which the Sirens are (τί ἐστὶ τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς μαντεῖον; τετρακτύς: ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ ἁρμονία, ἐν ἣ αἱ Σειρήνες)”), but Aristotle provides several more in other fragments, for example: “The sea is a tear of Cronus (τὴν θάλατταν μὲν ἐκάλει Κρόνου δάκρυον).” “The Bears [the Great Bear and the Little Bear] are the hands of Rhea (τὰς δ’ ἄρκτους Ῥέας χεῖρας).” “The Pleiades are the lyre of the Muses (τὴν δὲ πλειάδα μουσῶν λύραν).” “The planets are Persephone’s dogs (τοὺς δὲ πλανήτας κύνας τῆς Φερσεφόνης).” “The sound coming from bronze when it is struck is the voice of one of the daimones trapped in the bronze (τὸν δ’ ἐκ χαλκοῦ κρουομένου γινόμενον ἦχον φωνὴν εἶναί τινος τῶν δαιμόνων ἐναπειλημμένου τῷ χαλκῷ).” “An earthquake is nothing but a meeting of the dead (καὶ τὸν σεισμὸν ἐγενεαλόγει οὐδὲν ἄλλο εἶναι ἢ σύνοδον τῶν τεθνεώτων).” “A continuous ringing in the ears is the voice of Higher Powers (ὁ πολλακίς ἐπίπτων τοῖς ὠσὶν ἦχος φωνῆ τῶν κρειττόνων).”⁶⁰ These sayings appear to give allegorical ‘decodings’ of mythological elements in terms of Pythagorean cosmology, although some of the sayings go in the other direction, interpreting natural phenomena in terms of myth.⁶¹

58 Aristotle is nowhere mentioned in this passage, but extensive overlap with other known fragments makes an Aristotelian provenance plausible; see Rose (as in note 50) 202–204; E. Rohde, *Die Quellen des Iamblichus in seiner Biographie des Pythagoras*, *Rheinisches Museum* 26, 1871, 554–576; 27 (1872) 23–61 = *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 2, Tübingen–Leipzig 1901, 138–140; Hölk (as in note 52) 31–5; Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 167 n. 5. Although they accept the general Aristotelian provenance of the passage, J. A. Philip, *Aristotle’s Monograph On the Pythagoreans*, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 94, 1963, 190; id., *Pythagoras* (as in note 49) 148 n. 3; and Zhmud, *Pythagoreanism* (as in note 44) 96, 101; id., *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, Oxford 2012, 197 n. 110, 303 n. 62 remain cautious about the details, some of which may be due to Iamblichus or an intermediary.

59 πάντα δὲ τὰ οὕτως (καλούμενα) ἀκούσματα διήρηται εἰς τρία εἶδη· τὰ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν τί ἐστὶ σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ τί μάλιστα, τὰ δὲ τί δεῖ πράττειν ἢ μὴ πράττειν; *Vita Pyth.* 82.

60 Arist. fr. 196 Rose apud Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 41; Ael. *VH* 4,17.

61 Cf. Ch. Riedweg, *Pythagoras. His Life, Teaching, and Influence*. Translated by S. Rendall, Ithaca 2008, 73–76.

Other sources preserve various definitions without any connection to myth, for example, “Old age and every decrease are similar; increase and youth are the same (γηρας και παν τὸ μειούμενον ὁμοιον· και αύξην και νεότητα ταυτόν)”; “Health is the continuance of the [human] form,⁶² disease its destruction (ύγίειαν τὴν τοῦ εἶδους διαμονήν, νόσον τὴν τούτου φθοράν)” (Arist. apud D. L. 8,35);⁶³ “Virtue is harmony, and so are health and all good and God himself (τὴν τ’ ἀρετὴν ἀρμονίαν εἶναι και τὴν ύγίειαν και τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἅπαν και τὸν θεόν)”; “Friendship is harmonious equality (φιλίαν τ’ εἶναι ἐναρμόνιον ισότητα)” (Alex. Polyh. apud D. L. 8,33).⁶⁴ Such definitions are somewhat similar to sayings of the Seven Sages and may be analogous compositions.⁶⁵

The second type, identifying the superlative form or degree of something (τί μάλιστα), is based on a saying form popular in the sixth and fifth century. Several examples are given in Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 82: “What is most just? To sacrifice (τί τὸ δικαιοτάτον; θύειν).” “What is the wisest thing? Number; and in the second place, giving names to things (τί τὸ σοφώτατον; ἀριθμός· δεύτερον δὲ τὸ τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα τιθέμενον).” “What is the strongest? Insight (τί κράτιστον; γνώμη).” “What is said most truly? That men are evil (τί δὲ ἀληθέστατον λέγεται; ὅτι πονηροὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι).” Aristotle observes that this form is similar to the wisdom ascribed to the Seven Sages, and that the *akousmata* seem to “follow” (μετηκολουθηκέναι) such wisdom (*Vita Pyth.* 83). The attempt to discover the superlative form of things can indeed be traced back to the time of the Seven Sages.⁶⁶ A similar type of question, namely, “Who

62 Cf. Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 168 n. 18: “The suspicious word εἶδος, in true pre-Socratic fashion, means nothing more than the shape of the body.”

63 For the Aristotelian provenance of D. L. 8,35 see Delatte, *Études* (as in note 9) 277; id., *La vie de Pythagore de Diogène Laërce. Édition critique avec introduction et commentaire*, (Mémoires de l’Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques, 2. série, 17,2), Bruxelles 1922, 239; Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 168 n. 18. It now forms part of Arist. fr. 157 Gigon.

64 D. L. 8,33 derives from the *Pythagorean Notes*; see n. 52 above.

65 Cf. e.g. Thales apud D. L. 1,36: τί τὸ θεῖον; τὸ μήτε ἀρχὴν ἔχον μήτε τελευτήν; Solon apud D. L. 1,53: τὸν λόγον εἶδωλον εἶναι τῶν ἔργων; Pittacus apud D. L. 1,77: πρὸς τοὺς πυνθανομένους τί εὐχάριστον, ‘χρόνος,’ ἔφη· ἀφανές, ‘τὸ μέλλον’· πιστόν, ‘γῆ’· ἄπιστον, ‘θάλασσα.’ The fact that Pythagoras is included among the Seven Sages in some lists may be due to the fact that his sayings were similar to theirs. See the discussion below on more possible influence by the Seven Sages.

66 For parallels to the *akousmata* in *Vita Pyth.* 82, cf. e.g. Thales apud D. L. 1,35: κάλλιστον κόσμος· ποιημα γὰρ θεοῦ; ισχυρότατον ἀνάγκη· κρατεῖ γὰρ πάντων; σοφώτατον χρόνος· ἀνευρίσκει γὰρ πάντα; Pittacus apud D. L. 1,77: τί ἀριστον; τὸ παρὸν εὖ ποιεῖν; Cleobulus apud D. L. 1,93: μέτρον ἄριστον; Bias apud D. L. 1,88: οἱ πλεῖστοι ἄνθρωποι κακοί; Chilon apud Stob. 3,21,13: τί χαλεπώτατον; τὸ γινώσκειν ἑαυτόν; Thales apud Plut. *Sept. sap.* 153 D: τί ῥᾶστων; τὸ κατὰ φύσιν, ἐπεὶ πρὸς ἡδονάς γε πολλάκις ἀπαγορεύουσιν. Most of these have been noted by Delatte, *Études* (as in note 9) 285. For more examples of the use of the superlative, cf. Thales apud Plut. *Sept. sap.* 153 CD; D. L. 1,35 f. Burkert, *Lore and Science*

is the most pious, the happiest, the wisest?,” is prominent in anecdotes about the Delphic oracle going back to the sixth century BC.⁶⁷ It is very likely that Pythagoras collected such sayings, adapted them, and composed his own by analogy. Pythagorean composition is particularly apparent in sayings such as “The most beautiful of shapes are a sphere among solids, and a circle among plane figures (κάλλιστον σφαῖραν εἶναι τῶν στερεῶν, τῶν δ’ ἐπιπέδων κύκλον)” (Arist. apud D. L. 8,35).⁶⁸

Most of the extant *akousmata* belongs to Aristotle’s third type, sayings prescribing what should be done or should not be done (τί δεῖ πράττειν ἢ μὴ πράττειν). A few of these are again similar to the moral wisdom sayings of the Seven Sages: “One must beget children, for it is necessary to leave behind people to worship god (δεῖ τεκνοποιεῖσθαι [δεῖ γὰρ ἀντικαταλιπεῖν τοὺς θεραπεύοντας τὸν θεόν]);” “Do not help remove a burden (for one should not be responsible for someone’s not working), but help put it on (φορτίον μὴ συγκαθαρεῖν [οὐ γὰρ δεῖ αἴτιον γίνεσθαι τοῦ μὴ πονεῖν], συνανατιθῆναι δέ);” “Do not have intercourse with a woman with gold to beget children (χρυσὸν ἐχούση μὴ πλησιάζειν ἐπὶ τεκνοποιῶ);” “One should never give advice to someone except with the best intent; for advice is sacred (καὶ συμβουλευεῖν μηδὲν παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον τῷ συμβουλευομένῳ· ἱερὸν γὰρ συμβουλή);” “It is good to die when enduring and receiving wounds in the front, and vice versa (ὑπομένοντα καὶ ἔχοντα τραύματα ἐν τῷ ἔμπροσθεν τελευτῆσαι ἀγαθόν, ἐναντίως δὲ ἐναντίον)” (Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 83–85). Once again, it seems reasonable to assume that these sayings were modelled on sayings in general circulation.

Other precepts relate to religion and cult, and are similar to cult rules found elsewhere: “One should sacrifice and enter the temple barefoot (θύειν χρῆ ἀνυπόδητον καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἱερὰ προσίεσθαι).” “One should not turn aside to

(as in note 44) 169 gives extensive references to the Seven Sages and further cites the *Certamen*, the Aesop legend, Sapph. fr. 27 D. and the beginning of Pi. O. 1. To these we may add Thgn. 1,255 f.: κάλλιστον τὸ δικαιοτάτον· λῶστον δ’ ὑγιαίνειν· / πρᾶγμα δὲ τερπνότατον, τοῦ τις ἐρᾷ, τὸ τυχεῖν, cited as “the Delian inscription” by Arist. *E. N.* I 8.1099 a 27 f.; *E. E.* I 1.1214 a 5 f.

67 See R. Herzog, *Das delphische Orakel als ethischer Preisrichter*, in: E. Horneffer, *Der junge Platon I. Sokrates und die Apologie*, Giessen 1922, 149–170; F. Wehrli, *ΛΑΘΕ ΒΙΩΣΑΣ*. Studien zur ältesten Ethik bei den Griechen, Leipzig-Berlin 1931, 30–60; R. Joly, *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l’Antiquité classique* (Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques, Mémoires 51,3), Bruxelles 1956, 17. For the connection between the early tradition of the Seven Sages and the Delphic oracle see W. Rösler, *Die Sieben Weisen*, in: A. Assmann (Hrsg.), *Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, vol. 3, München 1991, 361 f.

68 Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 169 n. 23 gives the probable original form of the saying.

a temple; for one should not make god something incidental (εις ιερὸν οὐ δεῖ ἐκτρέπεσθαι· οὐ γὰρ πάρεργον δεῖ ποιῆσθαι τὸν θεόν)” (Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 85).⁶⁹

Several precepts concern dietary prescriptions: “One should only eat of animals that may be sacrificed, in whose case eating is fitting, but of no other animal (τῶν θυσίμων χρῆ ἐσθίειν μόνον, οἷς ἂν τὸ ἐσθίειν καθήκη, ἄλλου δὲ μηδενὸς ζῴου)” (Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 85); “Don’t eat the heart (μὴ καρδίαν ἐσθίειν)”;

“Abstain from beans (ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν κυάμων)”;

“Don’t touch fish that are sacred (τῶν ἰχθύων μὴ ἄπτεσθαι ὅσοι ἱεροί)” (Arist. fr. 194, 195 Rose; fr. 174, 157, 158 Gigon; apud Ael. *VH* 4,17; D. L. 8,19, 34).

A considerable number of precepts seem to be based on superstitious taboos: “Don’t talk without light (μὴ λέγειν ἄνευ φωτός)”;

“Don’t break a bread (τὸν ἄρτον μὴ καταγύναι)” (Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 84, 86). Such precepts were frequently provided with a figurative interpretation, as in Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 42, where it is called “another type of *symbolon*” (ἄλλο εἶδος τῶν συμβόλων): “Don’t step over a yoke, that is, don’t be greedy (ζυγὸν μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν, τοῦτ’ ἔστι μὴ πλεονεκτεῖν).” “Don’t stir fire with a knife, which is, don’t excite someone swelling with anger with sharp words (μὴ τὸ πῦρ τῆ μαχαίρα σκαλεύειν, ὅπερ ἦν μὴ τὸν ἀνοιδοῦντα καὶ ὀργιζόμενον κινεῖν λόγοις τεθηγμένους).” “Don’t walk on the highways, that is, don’t follow the opinions of the many, but exchange them for the opinions of the educated few (τάς τε λεωφόρους μὴ βαδίζειν, δι’ οὗ ταῖς τῶν πολλῶν ἔπεσθαι γνώμας ἐκόλυνεν, τὰς δὲ τῶν λογίων καὶ πεπαιδευμένων μεταθεῖν).” “Don’t receive swallows into your house, that is, don’t live under the same roof with talkative people who cannot curb their tongue (μηδὲ χελιδόνας ἐν οἰκίᾳ δέχεσθαι, τοῦτ’ ἔστι λάλους ἀνθρώπους καὶ περὶ γλῶτταν ἀκρατεῖς ὁμωροφίους μὴ ποιῆσθαι).” This report may perhaps also derive from Aristotle, although its source is a contentious issue.⁷⁰ Elsewhere such precepts are often associated with the tradition trans-

69 For some comparative material with other cult rules, see Burkert, *Lore and Science* (as in note 44) 177 f.

70 It is included in Arist. fr. 159 Gigon. Rohde (as in note 58) 139 n. 1 however argued that Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 82–86 and Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 42 cannot both be attributed to Aristotle, because in the Iamblichus passage the *akousmata* are given literal, religious explanations, while in Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 42 we find symbolic, moralising interpretations, a clear indication of two different sources. It is hard to see why the introductory statement in Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 42 with its reference to “another type [ἄλλο εἶδος]” cannot derive from Aristotle, since we find the same kind of language in Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 82, where Aristotle speaks of “three types [τρία εἶδη]” of *akousmata*. The classifying and systematising approach that we find in both the Porphyry and the Iamblichus passages seems typical of Aristotle. This point is well-argued by Philip, *Aristotle’s Monograph* (as in note 58) 189 f. in his criticism of Rohde’s thesis. The Aristotelian origin of *Vita Pyth.* 42 is also accepted by É. des Places (ed. and trans.), *Porphyre. Vie de Pythagore, Lettre à Marcella*, Paris 1982, 155 n. 4; M. Giangiulio (ed. and trans.), *Pitagora. Le opere e le testimonianze* (Classici Greci e Latini 120), Milano 2000, vol. 1, 147. It is however rejected by Hüffmeier (as in note 44) 240 f.

mitted by Androcydes, but they already form part of the collection used by Anaximander the Younger of Miletus.

V. The Reception and Use of the *Akousmata*

As we have seen, there are numerous references to the *akousmata* in the later period, but there is not so much direct evidence of the psychagogic use of these sayings. An explicit example of such use is provided by Ps.-Plutarch in *On the Education of Children*. After saying that children should not be allowed to associate with bad people, he then supports this by quoting several *akousmata* of which I only give the first three:

Τοῦτο δὲ παρήγγειλε καὶ Πυθαγόρας αἰνίγμασιν ἅπερ ἐγὼ παραθεῖς ἐξηγήσομαι· καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα πρὸς ἀρετῆς κτῆσιν συμβάλλεται ῥοπήν οὐκ ἐλαχίστην. οἶον·

“Μὴ γεύεσθαι μελανούρων,” τουτέστι μὴ συνδιατρίβειν μέλασιν ἀνθρώποις διὰ κακοῦθειας.

“Μὴ ζυγὸν ὑπερβαίνειν,” τουτέστιν ὅτι δεῖ τῆς δικαιοσύνης πλεῖστον ποιεῖσθαι λόγον καὶ μὴ ταύτην ὑπερβαίνειν.

“Μὴ ἐπὶ χοίνικος καθίσει,” ἥτοι φεύγειν ἀργίαν καὶ [12 E] προνοεῖν ὅπως τὴν ἀναγκαίαν παρασκευάσωμεν τροφήν.

This Pythagoras also has enjoined in the form of dark sayings which I shall now put before you and explain. For they contribute no small influence towards the acquisition of virtue. For example:

“Do not taste black-tails,” that is, “Do not spend time with people who are black because of their bad disposition.”

“Do not step over the scale of a balance,” that is, one should give greatest heed to justice and not transgress it.

“Do not sit on a bushel,” in other words, to avoid idleness and to take care that we provide for the food we need (Ps.-Plut. *Lib. educ.* 12 D–F; based on Babbitt’s LCL translation).

Several of these *akousmata* along with their figurative interpretations attained the status of proverbs; they are thus included in the lists of proverbs collected by Leutsch and Schneidewin.⁷¹ It is clear from this evidence that one of the

71 Cf. Apostolius 8,34o = Arsenius 27,54 (*Paroemiographi* 2,437); Apostolius 5,24d = Arsenius 14,56 (*Paroemiographi* 2,339); Apostolius 7,24a = Arsenius 33,58 (*Paroemiographi* 2,401); Apostolius 11,5a = Arsenius 35,16 (*Paroemiographi* 2,516); Apostolius 15,11 = Arsenius 44,11 (*Paroemiographi* 2,630 f.); *Mant. prov.* 2,81 (*Paroemiographi* 2,770); *Mant. prov.* 1,58 (*Paroemiographi* 2,753); *Mant. prov.* 2,9 (*Paroemiographi* 2,760); *Mant. prov.*

uses of the *akousmata* was that they, like other moral sayings, could be applied as the situation required to strengthen one's moral determination.

Some *akousmata*, such as those listed by Iamblichus ("One should sacrifice and enter the temple barefoot"; "One should not turn aside to a temple; for one should not make god something incidental"; *Vita Pyth.* 85), might have been treated like cult rules, but we don't have any evidence of such use in the later period.

What figures more prominently, however, in the evidence from the Imperial period is a fascination with the enigmatic nature of many of the *akousmata*. An obvious example of this is found in Plut. *Conv.* 8,7, 727 C–728 C which relates a conversation of Plutarch and his friends concerning the meaning of *akousmata* such as not to receive swallows as guests in the house or to wipe out the mark of a pot from the ashes. Many of the explanations offered are rather fanciful attempts by the participants to display their own intellectual prowess and general knowledge; the conversation remains on the level of a parlour game, with no direct psychagogic connection. At the same time this passage bears witness to the fact that these *akousmata* were commonly known, even if their meaning was disputed.

Early Christian authors also made use of the veiled nature of these *akousmata*, albeit for different purposes. Clement of Alexandria contends that the *symbola* (= *akousmata*) "depend in an extremely mysterious manner (ἐπιεκρυμμένως) on the barbarian (i. e. Jewish and Christian) doctrines" (*Strom.* 5,27,1). He then proceeds to give a detailed discussion of the *akousmata*'s dependence on biblical doctrines (*Strom.* 5,27,1–5,31,2). The putative connection between the *akousmata* and biblical material is made possible precisely by the enigmatic character of the Pythagorean sayings. Hippolytus of Rome, on the other hand, quotes several *akousmata*, each with a symbolic interpretation, to prove that the veiled teachings of the Gnostics are imitating Pythagoras, even though they do not acknowledge him (*Ref.* 6,26 f.; 6,28,1).

What is perhaps more interesting from the perspective of psychagogy, is the fact that the enigmatic nature of these *akousmata* stimulated thinking about their possible meaning. Aristotle (apud Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 86) had already denigrated attempts by outsiders to provide 'plausible explanations' (εἰκοτολογίαί) of the Pythagorean sayings, but Plutarch's Pythagorean friend Lucius has no objection to people trying to find a 'plausible or probable' interpretation for such sayings, even though the true meaning remains secret.⁷² It indeed seems as if the non-literal interpretations circulating under

2,10 (*Paroemiographi* 2,760); *Mant. prov.* 2,13 (*Paroemiographi* 2,760); *Mant. prov.* 2,17 (*Paroemiographi* 2,761).

72 *Conv.* 8,8, 728 F: Τοῦ δὲ Λευκίου πρῶως καὶ ἀφελῶς εἰπόντος, ὡς ὁ μὲν ἀληθὴς ἴσως λόγος καὶ νῦν ἀπόθετος καὶ ἀπόρητος εἶη, τοῦ δὲ πιθανοῦ καὶ εἰκότος οὐ φθόνος ἀπειρεῖσθαι ...

Androcydes' name became canonical, so that every *akousma* acquired a fixed meaning. Such is in any case the impression created by the lists of proverbs. On the other hand, the fact that Plutarch's friends still thought it made sense to try to discover the meaning of sayings indicates that this process remained open to some extent.

Iamblichus's commentary on the *akousmata* in the final chapter of his *Protrepticus* confirms this. As we have seen, Iamblichus uses the *akousmata* in the final stage of his protreptic; they represent the most advanced and technical type of sayings. In his discussion of each saying he sometimes starts with the conventional interpretation and then proceeds to a more advanced explanation; in other cases he provides an explanation reinterpreting the traditional explanation; while in still others he offers a completely novel interpretation, one not yet encountered in the history of tradition. In this form of protreptic the veiled, enigmatic nature of the saying forces the student to reflect on the meaning of the saying; a sayings hermeneutic thus becomes a psychagogic practise that encourages the student to explore the deeper meaning of such sayings and eventually discover the truth beyond appearance.⁷³

VI. Conclusion

It is clear that Pythagorean sayings like the *Golden Verses* and the *akousmata* were widely used by different authors, also outside the Pythagorean tradition, to help them in the process of moral formation. Some of these sayings, such as the exhortation to daily self-examination, were directly applicable as psychagogic aids; once mastered and internalized they were readily at hand to be used as the situation demanded. The meaning and applicability of other sayings, especially some of the *akousmata*, however, were not immediately apparent; they required significant hermeneutical effort before they could be used. Such effort in itself contributed to the psychagogic process.

73 Clem. *Strom.* 1,18,1; 1,56,3; 5,22,1–5,23,1 likewise emphasise the hermeneutical-pedagogic value of obscure sayings; cf. Orig. *Cels.* 3,45. See further Wilson (as in note 6) 27 n. 76; 40 n. 90.

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