

PYTHAGORIZOUSA IN PLAUTUS' *POENULUS*?

By

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In the last hundred years, correlations between New Comedy and Hellenistic ethical doctrine, especially that of the Peripatos, have received much scholarly attention¹. Pythagoreanism in Greek comedy was mentioned relatively recently in this context by Geoffrey Arnott in his commentary on the fragments of Alexis's *Tarantinoi* and *Pythagorizousa* (Arnott 1996). So far, however, little attention has been paid to this ideology – which was native to Italy – as a potential intellectual partner to Roman comedy². In the present essay I argue that Pythagorean echoes can be detected in one particular comedy, Plautus' *Poenulus*, and ask whether Plautus' audience might indeed have recognized them as such. Should the answer to the latter question be affirmative, we would be calling attention to a hitherto neglected nuance of the intellectual background of the *fabula palliata*.

1. *PUDOR MERETRICIUS*

My case study is the discourse of *pudor* put in the mouth of the prostitute Adelphasium in the *Poenulus*, which I will compare to pseudo-Pythagorean letters and treatises circulating under the names of 6th- or 5th-century female philosophers of that school. These texts ascribed to Melissa, Phyntis, and Theano contain primarily advice to women; they are almost certainly pseudonymous and have been dated between the fourth and third centuries BCE by Thesleff (1961)³.

¹ Peripatetic (e.g. Webster 1950: 195–219; Gaiser 1967: 8–38; Wehrli 1970: 147–152) and Stoic (e.g. Pohlenz 1940: 270).

² Arcellaschi's discussion (1982) of the original performance of the *Amphitruo* is, to the best of my knowledge, the only exception.

³ This dating has been challenged by several studies, both of particular authors of Pseudopythagorica and of groups of texts (cf. Macris 2002: 79–85), but no such challenge has been set regarding the date of the texts (allegedly) authored by women; for example Plant 2001 accepts