

## DICEARCHUS (FR. 41 MIRHADY) ON PYTHAGORAS' DEATH\*

by

TOMASZ MOJSIK

**ABSTRACT:** This study proposes a close reading of Dicearchus of Messana's account of the circumstances surrounding Pythagoras's death (fr. 41 MIRHADY). As the analysis shows, the purpose of Dicearchus' account was to demonstrate that at the moment of the anti-Pythagorean revolt the philosopher was not welcomed in any Italian cities because he was perceived as a danger to social and political stability. Such an interpretation of authorial intention stems from a new reading of the scene of Pythagoras' death in the temple of the Muses. Considering Dicearchus' narrative as a whole, it can be assumed that Pythagoras as a supplicant sought the protection of the gods, and his death should be interpreted as the effect of the philosopher's isolation in the temple by the inhabitants of Metapontum. Moreover, the author of this study considers the presence of the Muses in the story and the significance of this fact in the hypothesis concerning the essential role of the goddesses in the Pythagorean movement.

The circumstances surrounding the assault on the Pythagoreans' and Pythagoras' death are among the most challenging issues in Classical Studies<sup>1</sup>. The challenge stems from the sudden occurrence of the events themselves as well as from the uncertain status and late dating of the majority of the historical and biographical tradition. Most critical studies favour the opinion that the original sources confuse and mistakenly link two events that accompanied the anti-Pythagorean riots<sup>2</sup>. Hypothetically, one of them, dated from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the 490s BC, may have been related to Pythagoras' death; the second, estimated to have happened in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century, was allegedly organised directly against the Pythagoreans in Italian *poleis*. The scope of the events is equally doubtful: it is not certain whether the former was merely local – i.e. occurred in Kroton (and Metapontum?) – or whether the latter affected the whole of southern Italy. It needs to be stressed that, contrary to popular conviction, the

---

\* I would like to thank Gertjan VERHASSELT for allowing me to use fragments of his edition of Dicearchus, and Radosław PONIAT and Bogdan BURLIGA, who read and commented on my text at different stages of its composition.

<sup>1</sup> On available sources concerning Pythagoras' death, see BURKERT 1972: 97–120 (esp. 116–119), as well as VERHASSELT 2014: 424–428.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. ZHMUD 2012: 97–102; VERHASSELT 2014: 424–448.