

Iamblichus, *De communi mathematica scientia* xxii

Commentary by DSH & MRJ 2011 September 9

<chapter heading: commentary>

The content of the chapter xxii continues the discussion of chapter xxi in such a way that the chapter break seems artificial and intrusive. There are no variant readings of the title, however.

<xxii 67.3-14: commentary>

67.3-7 attribution: Οὐ μὴν ἐξαρκεῖ γε τοῦτο is an odd way to open a chapter, to say the least. It is possible that this was a piece of dialogue, objecting to the overly brief and superficial history connecting Pythagoras to the ancient mathematical traditions of Thales, the Egyptians, and the Chaldeans. It seems that Iamblichus then adds a transition of his own, again repeating that Pythagoras had received mathematical teachings from these sources, but moving on very rapidly to announce a discussion of Pythagoras' distinctive contributions.

67.3-5 ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ... δεῖ: Cf. 68.7-11. Seems like an Iamblichean formula of paraphrase.

67.7-12 attribution and voice: Aristotle, the character speaking is still Heraclides. The argument is that Pythagoras fitted what he had learned from the others into a systematic whole, along with his own discoveries. This more controlled attitude about Pythagoras' contribution to the development of philosophy is in line with Aristotle's remarks in the extant works.

67.13-14 attribution: transitional comment of Iamblichus.

<xxii 67.14-68.4: commentary>

67.14-19 attribution: That these are remarks of Iamblichus is strongly suggested by his use of "elements" in a strange way (not consonant with how the same term is used below), and by his mentioning of the symbola and rebarbative use of mathematical terminology, which is a thematic issue for him, discussed at the opening of the whole Pythagorean sequence VP I (see note below).

67.15 μέν: Festa notes *num* ("surely not") and offers the conjecture *δυναθώμεν*, but without much confidence.

67.16-17 τὴν συμβολικὴν καὶ ἀπεξωμένην χρῆσιν τῶν μαθηματικῶν λέξεων: In the opening chapter of his whole Pythagorean sequence, Iamblichus complains that the Pythagorean philosophical school "has been neglected, concealed by outlandish teachings and secret codes (τὸ μαθήμασις ἀπεξωμένοις καὶ τισιν ἀπορρήτοις συμβόλοις)" (*VP* 5.17-18). We prefer the translation "rebarbative" for ἀπεξωμένοις because the term means driving "away from". The Pythagorean Symbola are discussed by Iamblichus in two other significant places: in *VP* 18, in which a number (39?) of Symbola are iterated (we have attributed this excerpt to Aristotle's Protrepticus and assume it to be in the voice of Heraclides of Pontus). In *Protrepticus*

XXI Iamblichus repeats the (exact?) same Symbola, and then offers a one-by-one explanation of each of them.

67.25 ὀρμάται: Cf. end of Protr. X and 68.12 below.

67.19-68.4 attribution and voice: Aristotle, continuing the speech of Heraclides.

68.2-4 τσαῦτα γὰρ ἄν τις ἐν τῷ παρόντι ὡς κοινὰ ἐξείρεται τῆς τοιαύτης ἐπιστήμης προσθήσαιτο ἄν στοιχεῖα: For the phrase τῷ παρόντι, see XXI 66.14 above (voice of Iamblichus). Does “in the present day” refer to the mid-fourth century speaker in Aristotle’s dialogue, or is this a comment about mathematics “in the present day” of Iamblichus in II A.D.? This would seem not to be Iamblichus speaking because, while 68.2-4 is an approving comment about “present day” mathematical practices, at the end of the chapter Iamblichus complains that “*the mathematics that prevails today makes use of perception and imagination instead, and is a stranger to truth as well as having developed into an ally of becoming*” (69.22-24), before recommending that one should return to the Pythagorean methods just described. The concept of στοιχεῖα comes up again in Protr. VI 38.13-14 (see comm. ad loc.), where it is asserted that they (letters or “elements”) are necessary for knowledge. (This is not to be confused with Proclus’ discussion of the history leading up to Euclid’s *Elements*.) This seems to be a case, relatively rare, of an explicit separation of the source text from the cover text.

<xxii 68.8-69.3: commentary>

68.5-8 attribution:

68.7-11 ἀλλ’ ἐπεὶ ... δεῖ: Cf. 67.3-5 above (voice of Iamblichus).

68.8-24 attribution and voice:

68.8 ἐν μνήμασι τε ἀγράφοις διεσώζετο: In a discussion of Plato’s account of place in the *Physics*, Aristotle refers to ἀγράφοις δόγμασιν (209b15). See comments in (Ross, *Select*, 115-116): Them. *in Phys.* 106b21-23, Philoponus *in Phys.* 515.29-32 and 521.9-15; and Simplicius *in Phys.* 542.9-12 and 545.23-25. But Aristotle does not in the extant works refer to unwritten Pythagorean doctrines. There is a report of Philoponus, however, which suggests that he did discuss Pythagorean ideas in connection with discussing unwritten Platonic doctrines. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle mentions a doctrine of Plato in a work called *On Philosophy* (404b16-21), which Philoponus believed to be another name for *On the Good*, a work in which Philoponus reports that Aristotle discussed both Pythagorean and Platonic unwritten doctrines: “By the books *On Philosophy* Aristotle means the work *On the Good*; in this Aristotle reports Plato’s unwritten lectures (ἀγράφοις συνουσίας τοῦ Πλάτωνος); the work is genuine. He relates the views of Plato and the Pythagoreans about realities and first principles” (*in De An.* 75.34-76.1, tr. Ross, *Select*, 116).

68.12 ὀρμωμένους: See above 67.25 and Protr. X.

68.24-69.3 attribution: Iamblichus interrupts the speech to add his own comments, connected by his typical use of γὰρ.

68.26-7 τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμματος: the expression recurs one other time in Iamblichus, at *Protr.* XXI at 120.25, apropos of Symbolon 24. This Symbolon, according

to Iamblichus, symbolizes “do philosophy without rushing towards sensible images, certain of which produce a kind of light about the apprehensions (*katalepseis*), but are neither naturally nor truly luciform, but rather towards scientific ones in the intelligible realm, from which arise a certain illumination about the eye of the soul which is very bright and infallible” (120.20-26).

<xxii 69.4-22: commentary>

<xxii 69.22-29: commentary>

69.22-29 attribution: Iamblichus.

69.24 ἢ γὰρ νῦν ἐπιπολάζουσα: see above note on ἐν τῷ παρόντι (68.2).