

Exegesis and Intellectual Authority: The Strange Case of Porphyry's "Commentary on Ptolemy's *Harmonics*"¹

<https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2020/abstracts/2088PorphyryPtolemyHarmonics.pdf>

T1

Πολλῶν αἰρέσεων οὐσῶν ἐν μουσικῇ περὶ τοῦ ἡρμωσμένου, ὃ Εὐδόξιε, δύο πρωτεύειν ἂν τις ὑπολάβοι, τὴν τε Πυθαγόρειον καὶ τὴν Ἀριστοξένειον, ὧν καὶ τὰ δόγματα εἰς ἔτι καὶ νῦν σφζόμενα φαίνεται. (1,1-3 Raffa)

While there are many schools of musical science regarding the subject of attunement, Eudoxius, one could think that two of them have a preeminent position, the Pythagorean school and the Aristoxenian school, and their doctrines have been clearly preserved up to the present days.

T2

Ἰκανῶς δ' αὐτὰς πρὸς Πτολεμαίου μὲν Διδύμου τοῦ μουσικοῦ διακρίναντος ἐν προηγουμένῳ περὶ αὐτῶν συγγράμματι, Πτολεμαίου δὲ καὶ ἐξετάσαντος ἐν τοῖς Ἀρμονικοῖς καὶ τὴν ἀπ' ἀμφοῖν ὀφέλειαν ἐπιδείξαντος τὴν τε δοκοῦσαν πρὸς ἀλλήλας μάχην συμβιβάσαντος, ἔκρινα τῶν Πτολεμαίου Ἀρμονικῶν ἐξήγησιν καταβάλλεσθαι εἰδῶς μὲν μηδένα ἄχρι καὶ νῦν, ὅσον κάμῃ γινώσκειν, τουτὶ πεποιηκότα. (1,13-19 Raffa)

Since Didymus, the scholar of music, assessed these schools adequately **in his pioneering treatise about them**, and since Ptolemy **investigated** them in his *Harmonics*, and **he pointed out what is useful** in both of them and **reconciled** the apparent conflict between them, I decided to embark on the exegesis of Ptolemy's *Harmonics*, **knowing that no one until now has done this, as far as I am aware**.

T3

Ἐνήγε δέ με πρὸς τὴν ἐξήγησιν καὶ τὸ μόνον ἢ μάλιστα τὸν Πτολεμαῖον τὴν περὶ τὸ ἡρμωσμένον θεωρίαν τελεῶσαι οὐχ οὕτω τῇ προσθέσει—ὀλίγα γάρ ἐστι παντάπασιν, ἃ τοῖς παλαιοῖς προσεξεῦρεν—ὡς **τῇ κρίσει τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς θεωρημάτων**. **Κριτικὸς** γὰρ καὶ ἐλεγκτικὸς τῶν ὑγειῶν, εἰ καὶ τις ἄλλος, ἐν τῇ πραγματείᾳ ταύτῃ γέγονε (1,30-2,3 Raffa)

I was led to this exegesis by the fact that Ptolemy alone, or Ptolemy above all, brought to perfection the science of attunement, not so much by adding – few are in general the things that he discovered in addition to those discovered by the ancients – as in **the assessment of the theories found by them**. For Ptolemy has been a **judge (or interpreter)** and an cross-examiner of what is sound in this field, if anyone ever has.

T4

Dion. Thr. Ars § 1

γραμματικὴ ἐστὶν ἐμπειρία τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖς τε καὶ συγγραφεῦσιν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ λεγομένων. μέρη δὲ αὐτῆς ἐστὶν ἕξ· πρῶτον ἀνάγνωσις ἐντριβῆς κατὰ προσῳδίαν, δευτερον ἐξήγησις κατὰ

¹ All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

τοὺς ἐνυπάρχοντας ποιητικοὺς τρόπους, τρίτον γλωσσῶν τε καὶ ἱστοριῶν πρόχειρος ἀπόδοσις, τέταρτον ἐτυμολογίας εὗρεσις, πέμπτον ἀναλογίας ἐκλογισμὸς, ἕκτον κρίσις ποιημάτων, ὃ δὴ κάλλιστόν ἐστι πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ.

Grammar is experience of what is for the most part said by poets and prose writers. It has six parts. First, practiced reading aloud according to prosody; second, interpretation according to the poetic tropes present [in the text]; third, straightforward explanation of rare words and matters of fact; fourth, discovery of etymology; fifth, calculation of analogy; **sixth, judgement of poems, which is the finest part of all those [contained] in the art [of grammar].**

(Translation by Schironi)

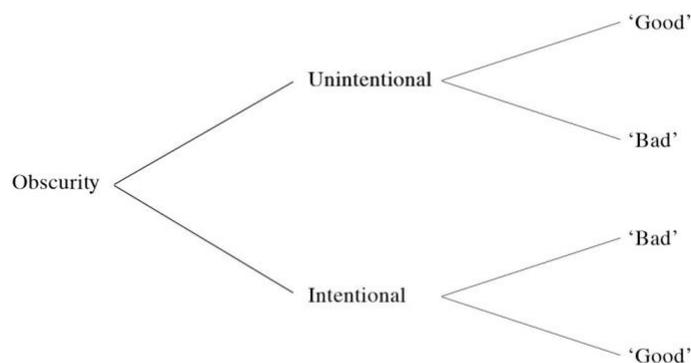
T5

ὁρῶν δὲ μὴ εὐσύνοπτον οὖσαν τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῖς μὴ τὰς αἰρέσεις ἀκριβῶς ἀνειληφόσιν ἐν τε τοῖς μαθήμασιν εἰσηγμένοις, ὧν ἐν πολλῇ ἔξει γεγονὼς οὗτος ἐμπέπληκε τὰ συγγράμματα, τὴν μὲν πρόφασιν τῆς χρήσεως λαβὼν παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων—οὐχ ἦττον γὰρ τῶν Πυθαγορείων καὶ οἱ Ἀριστοξένειοι ταῖς διὰ τῶν ἀριθμῶν χρῶνται ἀποδείξεσιν—αὐτὸς δ' ἐκ τῆς ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἐντρεχείας κατακόρως τούτοις χρησάμενος.(1,20-29 Raffa)

I see that reading this work is not an easy endeavor for **those who have not carefully acquired a knowledge of these schools and have not been trained in the mathematical sciences**, with which Ptolemy has filled his works, since he himself was a great expert, having taken the justification for using it from his predecessors – for the Aristoxenians too employ demonstration through numbers no less than the Pythagoreans – and since **he used it excessively himself** thanks to his skill in mathematics.

T6

From Sluiter 2016: 36



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