

Essays on the History and Culture of the Unknown Calabria

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Land of the Forgotten

Edited by

Caterina Pangallo

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Contents

Contributors	vii
Editor's Introduction	xi
I The Birth of Philosophy in Ancient Calabria JÜRGEN LAWRENZ	1
II The female Pythagorean Adelphoteta CATERINA PANGALLO	27
III Philosophy & Science—The Three Calabrians: Alcmaeon, Telesio, Campanella TONY LYNCH	45
IV The Jews of Sicily and Calabria: The Italian B'nei Anusim that Nobody Knows BARBARA AIELLO	66
V Arb'resh and Minor Literature: Carmine Abate, an Italian or Ethnic Author? EDNA LUBONJA	85
VI Calabrian Opera: The Brief Candle of Verismo JÜRGEN LAWRENZ	110
VII Dreaming a Theatre without Preconceptions: The Dramaturgy of Vincenzo Ziccarelli NATALE FILICE	126
VIII Discovering the 'Unknown Calabria' in Vincenzo Rabito's <i>Terra matta</i> : An archetypal perspective GIANNI ZAPPALÀ	148
IX Corrado Alvaro between Tradition and Modernity: A study of <i>Gente in Aspromonte</i> MADIHA BRIKI	188

X	Poetic Calabria: Metaphors among its Rocks ILARIA SERRA	219
XI	The Cranes of Ibykos FRIEDRICH SCHILLER	242
XII	Light and Shadow in Felice Mastroianni's Meridian Poetry ANDREA AMOROSO	248
XIII	Travellers To Calabria: Uncovering a Little Known Region ELIDA MEADOWS	266
XIV	“The Napoleon of Calabria” The Conquests of Robert Guiscard in the South of Italy CATERINA PANGALLO	301
XV	Artists-in-Residence: Renato Guttuso and The School of Scilla MARTA TOMA	327
XVI	Times and Spaces of Memory, The Musaba: Ruins and Waste in the Art of Nik Spatari STEFANIA GUGLIELMO & BARBARA PRIOLO	363
	Illustrations	371
	Name Index	380

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But my deepest gratitude goes to Jürgen Lawrenz in his capacity as executive editor. A man of many talents, he designed the whole book with his flair for old-time elegance and wrote two of the contributions and one translation. In times of doubt, especially when the going was hard, he kept my belief in this project going.

Introduction: Caterina Pangallo
A Homage to Calabria

IN WORLD HISTORY, Calabria is remembered as a land where the ancient Greeks raised a culture whose splendours filled many books with great admiration down to the present day. The same can be said of the Norman era, whose rulers turned their Kingdom of Sicily and Calabria into a jewel of great art and enlightened civilization in the middle of the Mediterranean.

But its other masters over the centuries, from the Romans of antiquity to the German, Byzantine, French, and Spanish overlords, did not evince much love for the region. The exploitation of its resources, regression into political tyranny, and impoverishment of the people became the rule. In their hands, Calabria turned into a kind of ‘third world’ country, an untamed natural wilderness that was matched by the primitive life forced on the natives. It was a state of affairs that could still be observed as recently as the unification of Italy during the Risorgimento. Neither the new Kingdom nor the ensuing Republic knew how to handle what they called “The Problem of the South.” The sole interest of northern Italians and the rest of the world was in its archaeology.

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that *La Bella Calabria* is the discovery of the generation living in the region today. It may be an outcome of the trend for globalization that served as an instigation, but the creative energies now alive deserve our greatest respect.

What this book seeks to accomplish is to reclaim the attention of the world to those immense disregarded riches – its history, arts and crafts, philosophy, and substantial intellectual legacy, together with the rejuvenation of much of the half-forgotten traditions by the younger generation. The social problems of the region are also discussed extensively.

As an editor, I have been fortunate to find a number of kindred spirits – scholars who all love and admire the authentic Calabria and were happy to make a contribution to this book in their special domain of interest, in which Calabria occupies a special place.

*

WE BEGIN WITH THE GOLDEN AGE OF CALABRIA and one of its

most scintillating personalities – Pythagoras. This essay mounts a claim that he was the actual inventor of philosophy. He not only coined the term but also took Anatolian thinkers into a different dimension, which makes him the founder of metaphysics – which has ever since then been accepted as the “first philosophy”. He made Calabria the “cradle of philosophy.” Apart from this, he was also a pioneer of science, music, mathematics, and cosmology.

The Pythagorean brotherhood was, of course, also accessible to women. Indeed, there is conspicuously ample literature written by female Pythagoreans. It may be said of Pythagoras that he gave the world an enlightened example by admitting women to his school for philosophical education. My essay on this aspect of Pythagoreanism traces this unique social phenomenon in “The Pythagorean Adelphoteta (Sisterhood)”.

As we learn from Tony Lynch, ancient Calabria was also famous for its research into medicine and physiology, which was spearheaded by the Krotonese Alcmaeon, one of the four most celebrated doctors of antiquity. Parts 2 and 3 of this essay take this up again in the work of Telesio and Campanella, encyclopaedic researchers of Renaissance Calabria. Their canvas is much broader, as they also embrace principles of the burgeoning Renaissance science (and are incidentally deeply indebted to theology).

The next two contributions deal with demographic minorities and their problems of integration in Calabria. We see this through the eyes of the rabbi author’s history of the Jews of Calabria, and on this author’s call to the many Jews who chose to hide their faith and ethnicity for centuries. In a similar way, author Lubonja’s discussion of Ar’bresh literature will involve readers in her passionate pleas against such classifications as ‘ethnic’ and ‘minority’ literature, her model being Carmine Abate, who wrote in Italian, Calabrese, Ar’bresh, and even German!

The Calabrian theatre comes next: first Verismo Opera, which in the minds of many opera buffs is associated with Sicily even though all four of its composers are natives of the Calabrian/Apulian peninsula.

With the spotlight changing to the present day, Filice’s essay deals with the contemporary playhouse of Vincenzo Zicarelli and the efforts of the modern Calabrian theatrical generation to discover its own voice and relevance in the context of modern art.

Related issues of modernity are also depicted by the next

two essays featuring two highly successful novelists – Vincenzo Rabito and Corrado Alvaro. For the former, our author Zappalà uncovers the mythological dimension to his *Terra matta*, in which the ‘unknown Calabria’ comes repeatedly to the surface of this otherwise largely Sicilian epic.

The Algerian author, in her turn, offers a deeply humanistic reading of Alvaro’s *Gente in Aspromonte*, exhibiting the wide scope of Alvaro’s message not just for Calabria but for all developing nations with a similarly ‘backward’ reputation. In that sense, according to her analysis, Alvaro’s book may stand as a model for young aspiring authors everywhere.

Next in the sequence is poetry, with author Serra discovering what she calls ‘metaphors’ in its uniquely poetical landscape. This is followed by a brief ‘antique interlude’ to bring Calabria’s most famous (albeit virtually ‘unknown’) poet to notice in the verse of another man: Friedrich Schiller’s ballad of *The Cranes of Ibykos*.

The third essay then examines some of the deeply moving verses of the Calabrian poet Felice Mastroianni in a searching depiction by Andrea Amoroso of his modern Italian and Greek poetry that touches the readers’ souls.

Conquest and travel are two different ways of experiencing Calabria. This region, including Puglia and Sicily, saw a conqueror, a “Napoleon of Calabria”, emulating the campaigns of Julius Caesar in Gaul. It is the stirring tale of one man – Robert Guiscard – subduing the entire South and making it his own demesne. But ultimately it was not for his own sake, since from his conquests arose one of the most resplendent cultures ever seen on earth – the Norman kingdom of Sicily and Calabria under the rule of his brother Roger I and his grandson Roger II. In the eyes of their contemporaries, “The Pearl of the Mediterranean”, was kept afloat by Frederick II until his untimely death in 1251.

The next contribution delineates the more sedate sojourn of English travellers. Author Meadows traces the reputation acquired by Calabria through the eyes of visiting English tourists, which came to be adopted fairly uncritically by their countrymen who wrote about their adventures. It was the beginning of a dispersion by the media of Calabria as a still untamed region of Europe. It is only in the last few decades that travel blogs are beginning to show a shift in the age-old stereotype of Calabria as a land of criminals

and surly uneducated peasants.

The last two essays devote themselves to art. Marta Toma recounts the convoluted social environment of the 1950s in which the school of Scilla, as a highly politicized quasi-institution, reacted to the demands of political factions to be involved in their struggles for power. The essay depicts a group movement of artists devoting themselves to preserving the beauty of the art of the Scilla school, emphasizing the moral inspiration for artistic empowerment. Artist Renato Guttuso presented through his art the working class in their poor and powerless condition. It showed the solidarity of the left in the preservation of genuine art. During post-war reconstruction, they took the side of the weakest, taking up their tools to document the living conditions of the people and how Calabria was unjustly repressed by its history of foreign domination and isolation.

Lastly, the two authors depicting the Musaba draw attention to the 'beautification' of the landscape via selected snapshots. It is a site that represents a 'spiritualized' combination of the past and the present. The artists used both archaeological debris and common untended remnants (garbage) dispersed over the site for recycling to give artistic expression to them and integrate them with the environment, infusing it with new life.

The chief impression that should emerge from this volume is the extraordinary range, variety, and quality of Calabrian culture over nearly 2800 years.

I hope readers will find enjoyment and edification in this volume; and for Calabrian readers, that it may provide a source of pride in their region, which has so much wonderful history and culture on its back!

A Personal Note

I began planning this book a few years ago after a visit to Calabria, which inspired me. On my return home, I read my short stories, written over the years, most of them involving my father and his comrades in the politics of the 1950s. But then more memories came flooding back, and I became more curious about the history of Calabria. The more I widened my net of reading, the more I realised that anglophone writings about the region are very few and mostly gossip. But as it happened, some of my father's comrades were still alive and I began interrogating them about conditions in Calabria. From here I drew the inspiration for more information

about Calabria and set off on an extended study into every facet of the region's history.

Through my conversations and reading, I discovered that Calabria is a place of many hidden treasures. My experiences were positive and inspiring. I found that those treasures are best discovered with an open heart and mind. In other words, I felt a sense of purpose emerging – to describe and explain to the world the background of this region.

At last I realised that the wish had grown inside me to put all this into a book. Most of this information was unknown to people in the world, even in Italy, hence the title of the book. I was taken by its immensely long-standing culture, art, theatre, philosophy, and literature, and wanted all this expressed in a book, which would obviously involve the co-operation of other scholars knowledgeable about Calabria who shared the same interest with me.

And so these stories came together amid much enthusiasm on all sides, and I sincerely hope that readers will come to these essays with an open mind and discover much that is memorable.

~ I ~

The Birth of Philosophy in Ancient Calabria¹

Jürgen Lawrenz

Numeri virumque cano . . .



The Twin Sisters of Philosophy

THE ALMOST SIMULTANEOUS emergence of philosophy among emigrant Greeks east and west of the mainland, circa 600 BC, is so well known that it seems superfluous to go over this ground again. Yet it transpires that a momentous difference of approach to this new intellectual discipline manifested itself in short order between the Anatolian and Italian Greeks which indeed perdures in philosophy into the present day. There are many ways of describing this difference, but the simplest is this: The Anatolian thinkers looked at the material constitution of the world in the hope of unravelling its structure and manners of aggregation, whereas the Italians were more prone to look for causes, connections, and relations. It is the difference between asking ‘how’ and ‘why’ – in one case, how simple matter particles (*archai*) come to be

1) This essay sustains a claim for the Calabrian region as the birthplace of ‘philosophy proper’. Although certainly not unknown to professional historians of philosophy, the weight of classical Athenian as well as Alexandrian philosophy has tended to undeservedly blot out these pioneering achievements by Calabrian thinkers.

aggregated into the things of which the world is made; in the other case, what kind of principles operate to propel this matter towards the great variety of forms, motions, and energies that we can observe but are plainly not ‘in’ the matter itself.

It is easy to see an agenda being developed in these two approaches that eventually gave rise to a serious science. The first group, whose initiators were citizens of the Greek polis of Miletos, are known by the names of Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, and we presume that a teacher-pupil relationship prevailed among them.¹ Their debates, which revolved around various candidates for an absolutely fundamental element (e.g., water, air, fire, or earth), were resolved some 150 years later by Demokritos, who urged on logical grounds that none of these elements qualify as they are already aggregates and can easily be disaggregated, e.g., water by evaporation, fire by moisture, and so on. Therefore, the target of the search must be a corpuscle that cannot be reduced individually; that is, in fact, so small that it cannot be cut in half. As such, it acquired the term ‘a-tomos’ (‘indivisible’, i.e., atom). This proposition is indeed compelling but purely theoretical since atoms are obviously below the threshold of visibility and therefore cannot be examined as to their actual existence.²

All this was the strenuous effort of men who committed themselves to the notion that, in principle, it should be pos-

1) Miletos (near the present Turkish seaport of Kusidasa) was at the time one of the most affluent Greek trading cities with more than 90 affiliates on the African, European and Black Sea shores.

2) In other words, Atomism remained a speculative option for thinkers. Thus Epikuros, Lucretius, and in early modern times Descartes, Gas-sendi, Galileo, Newton, and their contemporaries were all ‘corpuscularians’. But atoms could not be demonstrated until early in the nineteenth century when John Dalton derived the first experimental proof for their actual existence.

sible to obtain real knowledge of the matter of which Earth and the cosmos are constituted. They did not have practical results (such as technology) at the back of their minds but the accumulation of wisdom. As Aristotle would say much later, “We do philosophy because we wish to know”.¹ One gains the impression from these early materialistic philosophers (as well as from Aristotle) that they were all, in one way or another, agnostics in terms of their attitude to religion, although the term ‘atheists’ does not fit. They were all conventionally religious in the Greek manner, believing in the gods without attributing ultimate powers to them, as we find in the Judaeo-Christian religion.

Biofictions of a thaumaturge

It is otherwise with the philosophers on Italian soil. Paradoxically, the man who inaugurated the ‘Italian’ wing of philosophy, Pythagoras, was also a native Anatolian. His birthplace, the island of Samos, was just a cat’s jump across the sea from Miletos.² Born in 570 BC, it is eminently possible that he studied with Anaximenes as a young man. It is an attractive proposition because Anaximenes learnt his mathematics from Thales, who was a pioneer of that science, while Anaximenes was the thinker who put the ‘breath of life’ (pneuma) on the map as a philosophical topic.

But with Pythagoras, a trend of common as well as literary hero worship sprang up that quickly obscured the empirical personality for history. It is said that where there’s smoke, there is a fire, but in his case, we are made aware of too much holy water being sprinkled on his funeral pyre, so the smoke is thick, black and altogether impenetrable.

This leaves us latecomers with only one option – assessing the gossip in context of the few attending factors that are

1) *Met.*, 980a.

2) Crossing by sail takes about seven hours in good weather.

actually believable.¹

For example, we hear that Pythagoras sojourned in Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia for 20 years to study their religions and mathematics. We can dismiss the claims for mathematics without further ado – none of those cultures possessed a mathematical science in our sense of the word:

Mathematics as an organised, independent and reasoned discipline did not exist before the classical Greeks ... [but there were] prior civilisations in which the beginnings or rudiments of mathematics were created.²

In a word, those writers confused reckoning with mathematics. They forgot that Thales also visited Egypt once and asked the priests for the height of the Cheops pyramid. When they could not tell him, he demonstrated how easily it could be ascertained by comparing the length of a rod's shadow with that of the pyramid.³ As for Babylonian astronomy, it would hardly occupy a man of Pythagoras' intellectual capacity for more than an annual rotation of the sky to learn everything the priests could teach him.

The religious claims are equally untenable. We may be willing to concede that Pythagoras, a man well known for his spiritual aspirations, studied the religions of those realms, but

1) For example, it is not believable that Pythagoras had a golden heel, that he alone had the capacity to hear the music of the spheres, that the god Apollo was somehow implicated in his birth, and so on. But such things were written by gullible (or sensation-seeking) writers belonging to a later era (Iamblichus, Diogenes, and Porphyry, all in competition with each other) who seem to have been persuaded that a biography of Pythagoras should contain all manner of portents and prodigies to ensure good sales.

2) Kline, p. 3. The gist of Kline's explanations is that reckoning with an abacus served those 'empires' well enough for a calendar, trade, money, and weights and measures, though mostly by the rule of thumb passed on from an elder to his apprentice in whatever field.

3) Kline, p. 28; Guthrie, p. 53. Thales is credibly associated with the first formulation of the principles of ratio and proportion.

it is impossible to agree that he would need decades to grasp what there was to learn. Yet the underlying error is much simpler – namely that Pythagoras subscribed to the doctrine of metempsychosis, which *none* of the oriental religions cultivated but the Orphic Greeks of Thessaly did. Therefore, it is illogical to expect Pythagoras to waste 20 years of his young manhood on religious enquiries that he could easily pick up in his own Greek backyard!

So much for legends. Unfortunately, the facts are even thinner on the ground. Trustworthy witnesses we have, but they have remarkably little to say.¹ The wandering bard Xenophanes ridiculed Pythagoras' transmigration doctrine in an epigram in which he makes the philosopher recognize a dog's voice as that of a departed friend (good for a laugh around the campfire!). The writer Ion of Chios makes one mention of "Pythagoras, wise in all things, truly knew and understood the minds of men". The historian Herodotus, on the other hand, serves up a legend (also connected to transmigration) that he disbelieved himself but nevertheless narrated in the context of the weird and strange beliefs that some men hold. Last but not least, there is an eloquent testimony by the poet-philosopher Empedokles of Akragas (Agrigento), who was himself partial to the idea of metempsychosis and clearly in awe of Pythagoras:

There was among them a man of surpassing knowledge, who possessed a vast wealth of understanding, capable of all kinds of clever acts; for when he exerted himself with all his understanding, easily did he see every one of all the things that are, in ten and even twenty human lives.²

Our final witness is Herakleitos of Ephesos, an offspring of former kings but, subsequent to the democratization of the

1) The ensuing quotations are collected and evaluated by Guthrie, pp. 157–161.

2) loc. cit.

polis, reduced to holding the office of a priest. He was given to musing on human nature and the permanent cosmic flux – the expression *panta rhei* (everything flows forever) is his. At one stage in his life, he placed a book of his writings on the altar of Demeter, which was his way of publishing it. He mentions Pythagoras three times in thoroughly derogatory terms:

Pythagoras, the son of Mnesarchos, practised research more than any other man, and having made a selection of these writings contrived a sophisticated polymathy of his own: but it is all a worthless artifice.¹

Since Pythagoras enjoined the members of his later brotherhood not to broadcast any of their studies to the untutored, this must be a reference to work published by Pythagoras while still living on Samos. It is indeed more plausible to assume that the transport of books by ferry from Samos to nearby Ephesos was much easier than by ship from Calabria.

But there is more. Herakleitos disliked especially those writers and poets who were steeped in religion, so on hearing of Pythagoras' inclination to metempsychosis, he lumped him as “the chief of swindlers” with Homer, Hesiod, Xenophanes, Archilochos, and others as men of worthless knowledge and little understanding. One can only wonder how these castigations of revered figures must have sounded to the Greeks who read them!

After these preliminaries, we arrive finally at the decisive moment in Pythagoras' life when Kroton in Calabria beckoned and he was set on course for an immortal fame that he might not have otherwise acquired – when, in Bertrand Russell's words, he became “intellectually one of the most

1) loc. cit.

important men that ever lived”.¹

How this came about is itself an intriguing story (though we must be brief). The tyrant of Samos c. 540–522 BC was Polykrates. The history of his reign is very interesting by reason of the sheer wealth and opulence he amassed by way of unashamed large-scale piracy. On account of his father being a gem cutter, Pythagoras was often with him at court and was eventually patronized by the tyrant. But at some stage in his manhood, Pythagoras got fed up with Polykrates’ overbearing manner and accepted an invitation by the Krotonese to teach in their polis. This argues for Pythagoras already enjoying a good reputation abroad. It was at much the same time that Polykrates was wavering between supporting Egypt or Persia in their war. Upon misreading certain manoeuvres of the Persian fleet as signs of weakness, he unwisely tangled with them and came to grief by treachery in his own court.²

By then Pythagoras was safely settled in his new home, ready to embark on a course of philosophizing that would justify Russell’s above-quoted encomium.

This began with nothing less than giving the intellectual activities inaugurated by the Milesian thinkers a new name. It appears that, early on, Pythagoras was accosted by a worthy citizen of Kroton with the (possibly suspicious) question of whether his teaching would follow the materialistic trend of Thales and the other Anatolians as, after all, Pythagoras was a native of the same region. The reply he got was, “I am a lover of wisdom”, coupling the Greek *philo* (lover) with *sophos* (wisdom). This would have undoubtedly assuaged the questioner not only because the word ‘wisdom’ was commonly traded in respect of the oriental civilizations and their theocratic longevity but also because the average Greeks lacked

1) Russell, p. 29.

2) Origin of the legend of “The Ring of Polykrates”, recounted in Herodotus, Bk. III, Ch. 42 and Schiller’s with the same title.

nothing in terms of piousness towards their gods.

Pythagorean enlightenment

The biographies we have alluded to tell us a lot about the immediate impact of Pythagoras on the Krotonese people. It is a pity we cannot rely on them, although some sound plausible enough to reflect the facts as they may have occurred. Therefore, it is altogether likely that he delivered an oration before the assembled notables outlining his ideas for the improvement of the social and intellectual culture of the polis. He seems to have stressed from the beginning that sexual discrimination cannot be tolerated in the educational field inasmuch as the intellectual inferiority of women is nothing but a male prejudice (he may have appealed to the precedent at Sparta where women enjoyed much greater respect than elsewhere in the matter of raising their sons to the ethos that prevailed there). Accordingly, he asked for an assembly of the women and a second oration on the role he foresaw for them under his guidance.

As he seems to have been imposing in personality as well as in his physical appearance, his eloquence struck a favourable chord with the people, and it is said that he persuaded them to build a school so he could begin his work.

Here we are on safer grounds as to factuality as the method of tuition he employed has never been questioned. He divided the pupils not along gender lines but on their willingness to engage themselves with his doctrines. He would deliver one course of lectures to people who wished to hear him speak and learn the important principles he wished to convey without actually studying them. Hence they were known as *akusmatikoi* (auditors). Another, evidently much smaller, group would enrol for intensive study and commit themselves to an equivalent of the English boarding schools; in other words, living with the master and their fellow students

for some weeks at the school, sharing meals, excursions, and physical exercises along with the tuition. These pupils, who were in earnest about their studies, were called *matematikoi*.

One of the rules Pythagoras imposed on this group was ‘secrecy’. This has been widely misinterpreted. It did not mean that it was a secret doctrine but simply that it was unsuitable for the eyes and ears of non-initiates by reason of its complexity: They would inevitably misjudge what they read or heard. In other words, his teachings were not to be written down but committed to memory. Nevertheless, it stands to reason that this rule provoked curiosity as well as mistrust; i.e., “What are they up to behind closed doors?”

In due course, the imposing personality at the helm of the school was enjoined to take up a responsible office in the state’s administration. This involved (as was common practice among the poleis of the time) upgrading the constitution as well as town planning, building projects, and other civic issues. But the biggest test for him was not long in coming. Holding many, if not all, the skeins of internal politics in his hands, Pythagoras soon found himself compelled to deal with Kroton’s most hated rival, the city of Sybaris. Apart from gossip, we hardly know what this was about, but they had been fighting with each other over such a long time that the origin of the conflict was barely remembered. Therefore, whatever the contention at the time, Pythagoras was the *de facto* leading citizen and obliged to take up the role of ‘strategos’ (commander) to lead an army to Sybaris.

To briefly explain the status quo between them: Sybaris was at that time probably the wealthiest of all Greek city states and not shy of exhibiting this status at any given opportunity. For example, Sybarians taught their horses to dance dressed in the most opulent stuff and colours, like the Viennese Lipizaner stallions in our time. Conversely, the Krotonese took pride in having more trophy winners at the Olympic Games

inside their walls than any other polis. They would naturally be fighting in this war as well.¹

It is said that the horses were Sybaris' undoing in this battle. The Krotonese began the battle by playing music to induce the horses to dance. This trick worked like a charm; the disabled Sybarite cavalry was overrun and, as matters like this tend to pan out, the hatred escalated into a tide of senseless destruction. Sybaris collapsed in a heap of rubble and never recovered.

For Pythagoras, this victory lent him greater authority than all his fine words and sentiments. Becoming the *princeps* of the polis was not perhaps the role he had aspired to, but it served him well. He went on to establish certain moral and ethical precepts, propagate the Orphic religion (including its doctrine of the transmigration of souls), and engage in scientific research, his most persistent pursuit.

'Philosophia prima' – Child of Calabria

The presumed origin of the word 'philosophy' bears intriguing ramifications. It is, after all, a well-known fact that Pythagoras was as good as his word. By this I do not merely mean his educational programme but rather, and more specifically, a thorough reorientation of the philosophical agenda itself.

In other words, a situation was developing that bears a certain resemblance to the contention between the 'natural philosophy' of thinkers of the early modern era, from Roger Bacon to Isaac Newton, and the 'philosophy proper' of the metaphysicians at Oxford, of which one outcome was a name change from 'natural philosophy' to 'science'. This did not prevent a thinker like Leibniz from embracing science and publishing papers on the subject matter. In the same way,

1) In the Wikipedia website "List of people from Calabria", a dozen Krotonese athletes are mentioned by name, including the wrestler Milo, who appears even in Aristotle's.

Pythagoras gave equal billing to science in his educational curriculum.

But of the essence to Pythagoras and his followers was ‘philosophy proper’. Facts may be studied, discovered, and elaborated upon, yet they remain *ad hominem* throughout. Mathematics has a deep relevance to humans insofar as it serves our understanding of phenomena – we need only to look at our present world and how much our lives are ruled by numbers whereas (of course!) there are no numbers at all in nature. There is no music in nature either: it ‘exists’ because animals possess senses that are stimulated by aerial vibrations and learn how to manipulate parts of their musculature to produce vibrations of a kind that are meaningful to other creatures.¹ The planets, in turn, were believed to be moving in orbit with consonant musical ratios and ‘sound’ in accordance with the same relations as the tones of a phorminx (although Pythagoras conceded they are too far away to be audible to humans).

Readers will have recognized by now that Pythagoras was bringing physical items into concordance with items that are explananda, hence creatures of human understanding. Numbers, ratios, concordances, and harmony may all be surmised to ‘exist’ in some way but not as entities. Rather, their office as explananda is to become attached as auxiliaries to factual items by way of supplementary features over which our reason and imagination exert control – in the sense that our understanding is definitely enhanced by including them in our accounts of the physical world. In the Greek language, they are therefore *meta-physica* – ‘supplementary to’ physics, but they do not directly pertain to physics.

1) In other words, one cannot derive an ontology of music (as many thinkers have tried to do) purely from the multitude of sounds in our surroundings that strike our ears while we are in a waking state. Without a capacity for aural perceptions, these sounds would not exist.

We have now sounded the word that has wrought immense confusion in the minds of adepts of philosophy when the term was hijacked by early theologians to denote the powers and/or existence of spiritual entities. The suggestion was obviously that if associating such explananda with the instantiation of music, passion, excitement, and beauty was permissible, then the plausible conclusion ensued that metaphysics opens the gateway to proving the existence of gods, devils, angels, and saints as well. It is all rather strange because ‘instantiation’ refers to physics again, and therefore to ontology. Hence the persistence of the many futile ‘ontological proofs’ from Anselm of Canterbury down to our own day!

The point we have now reached enables us to draw a clear and indeed undisputed demarcation line between two categories of philosophical thinking, ‘natural philosophy’ and ‘first philosophy’ (Aristotle’s term), the latter synonymously called ‘philosophy proper’, ‘*prima philosophia*’, or ‘metaphysics’. The first deals primarily with the empirical domain; the other with the supplementary (immaterial) speculative aspects.

Thus, metaphysics was Pythagoras’ forte. By focusing his enquiries on music, numbers, and the mysteries of the heavenly spheres, he placed himself in philosophical *terra incognita* inasmuch as these topics are not amenable to physics-cosmology research but reserved for the mind to unravel in their relationship to the world’s *onta*.¹

Merely as an incidental comment, it is worth pointing out that thinkers like the aforementioned Thales, his pupils, and Demokritos would today be assigned to a professorship in theoretical physics, whereas Pythagoras would be lecturing on the same subject matters as in his time at Kroton.

Considering that this essay comprises the first chapter in a

1) A reader who wishes to make an immediate survey of these topics is advised to consult Aristotle’s , Book Delta, which is in the form of a lexicon of the terms of ‘First Philosophy’.

book bearing the title *The Unknown Calabria*, we are now in a position to lift the veil on its ulterior meaning –namely that Pythagoras’ philosophical enterprise marked the inception of an arm of philosophy that departed from the physics-quasocosmology of the earlier thinkers and created a new branch of enquiry and speculation, the aforesaid *metaphysics*, which in the eyes of the Christian era has always been regarded as *philosophy per se*. But this means nothing other than *philosophy as we have understood it for the past 2500 years is a child of Calabria*.¹

The number cosmos

During his residence at Kroton, Pythagoras married and fathered three daughters and a son. It goes without saying that all four of them benefited from his instruction. Just as well, perhaps, since he fell out of favour in his later years and was obliged to remove himself and his family to Metapontion. He died there in c. 495 BC aged 75. His women continued the school, from all accounts successfully, earning the greatest respect of the Italian Greeks.

However, our preoccupation with this school in the present chapter is with the novelties that characterize Pythagoras’ philosophical agenda. As such it is most important to understand the one criterion that was uppermost on the minds of Greek educators: the idea that *the health of a person’s soul depends altogether on a sound personal, social, and pious upbringing*. It was for precisely for this reason that Sokrates coined the immortal epithet: “An unexamined life is not worth living”

1) One of the few recent authors of philosophical history to mark out Calabria for this honour was Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), whose book on the philosophy of Leibniz contains the point-blank assertion that “is by birth an Italian.” Moreover, the word ‘Italian’ is set in the feminine gender; and he then adds that some of the “fiery heat” of the southern sky (i.e., the passion for speculation) is still retained by philosophy no matter which part of the world it was later transported to.

when he perceived it being sorely neglected in his Athenian environment.

But this was long after Pythagoras became animated by the same impulse: What could (after all) be more important than preserving or enhancing the purity of the soul entrusted to one's care than ensuring it is fit for Elysium when it has run its course of incarnations? Also, what could be more pleasurable and valuable for the soul than to be enriched by the music of instruments the gods devised for our and their own heavenly delectation?¹ Both these questions point to the overriding desideratum of an *assimilation to the divine*.

Somehow, it was Pythagoras' insight into musical pleasures in combination with the mystery posed by the vibrations of the lyra's strings and the holes drilled into a reed (which seemed to obey a discernible pattern of connections to the emotional uptake by the order in which they were activated) that lit the fuse for him.

How it happened is a very instructive tale of discovery.² Pythagoras must have been plucking the strings of a lyra and noticed that he was producing a relationship between concordant tones that could be expressed with the numbers 1 :

1) Lyra, phorminx, and kithara are all types of hand-held harps or lutes with three to ten strings, the last-named being the largest: "The smaller lyra served amateurs and was used for more intimate occasions, while the kithara was reserved for artists and virtuosi" (Lang, p. 7). The other chief instrument was the aulos (oboe [almost unanimously and erroneously called 'flute' in modern language translations]); its invention was attributed to Hermes while Apollo devised the lyra from a tortoise shell and gifted it to the legendary singer Orpheus.

2) Once again we need to beware of nonsense stories: one of them tells us of Pythagoras visiting a smithy and hearing different types of hammers banging on an anvil and producing their unique sounds. Whoever wrote this was evidently unaware of the fact that an anvil responds with the same sound no matter which hammer is used. As a percussionist once said: "It is the bell that sounds, not my sticks!"