

The *Pythagorean Notes* Reported by Alexander Polyhistor on Health and Disease

Abstract

The *Pythagorean Notes* reported by Alexander Polyhistor blends old Pythagorean doctrines with Presocratic, Academic, Peripatetic and Stoic ideas. Although the eclecticism of the *Pythagorean Notes* has been often restricted to philosophy, one of its striking features, compared to the other Pythagorean writings of the Hellenistic period, is that the anonymous author incorporated in the text various doctrines concerning the aetiology of health and disease, the corporeal origin of the seed, the importance of the hot for living beings, and the embryonic formation in accordance with the ratios of harmony. I suggest that this material reflects four core ideas attested in the earliest specimens of philosophical and medical writings:

- (a) the full understanding of biological processes requires an understanding of how the cosmos functions and affects its minimal occupants, namely living beings;
- (b) the body constitutes a dynamic field where opposite forces try to establish their dominance and, as a result of their temporary victories and defeats, they rotate in office;
- (c) a primary stuff, which holds a prominent position in the cosmic sphere, generates life, and its multiple manifestations mark the main variations found in the cosmos;
- (d) the soul is a particle of this primary stuff and moves into different regions of the cosmos on account of its virtue, after separating from its original source and entering into the bodies of mortal beings.

Stavros Kouloumentas

University of Ioannina