

JUNIOR
BIOGRAPHY
FROM
**ANCIENT
CIVILIZATIONS**

PYTHAGORAS

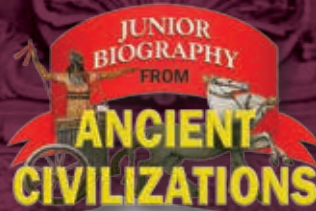
ALICIA KLEPEIS



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: The facts on which the story in this book is based have been thoroughly researched. Documentation of such research can be found on pages 44–45. While every possible effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the publisher will not assume liability for damages caused by inaccuracies in the data, and makes no warranty on the accuracy of the information contained herein.

To reflect current usage, we have chosen to use the secular era designations BCE ("before the common era") and CE ("of the common era") instead of the traditional designations BC ("before Christ") and AD (*anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord").

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CONTENTS

Chapter One

- Fish, Bears, and Oxen—Pythagoras
and Animals5
- What People Ate in Ancient Greece9

Chapter Two

- The Early Life of Pythagoras11
- Physical Fitness in Greece17

Chapter Three

- Pythagoras on the Move19
- Babylon23

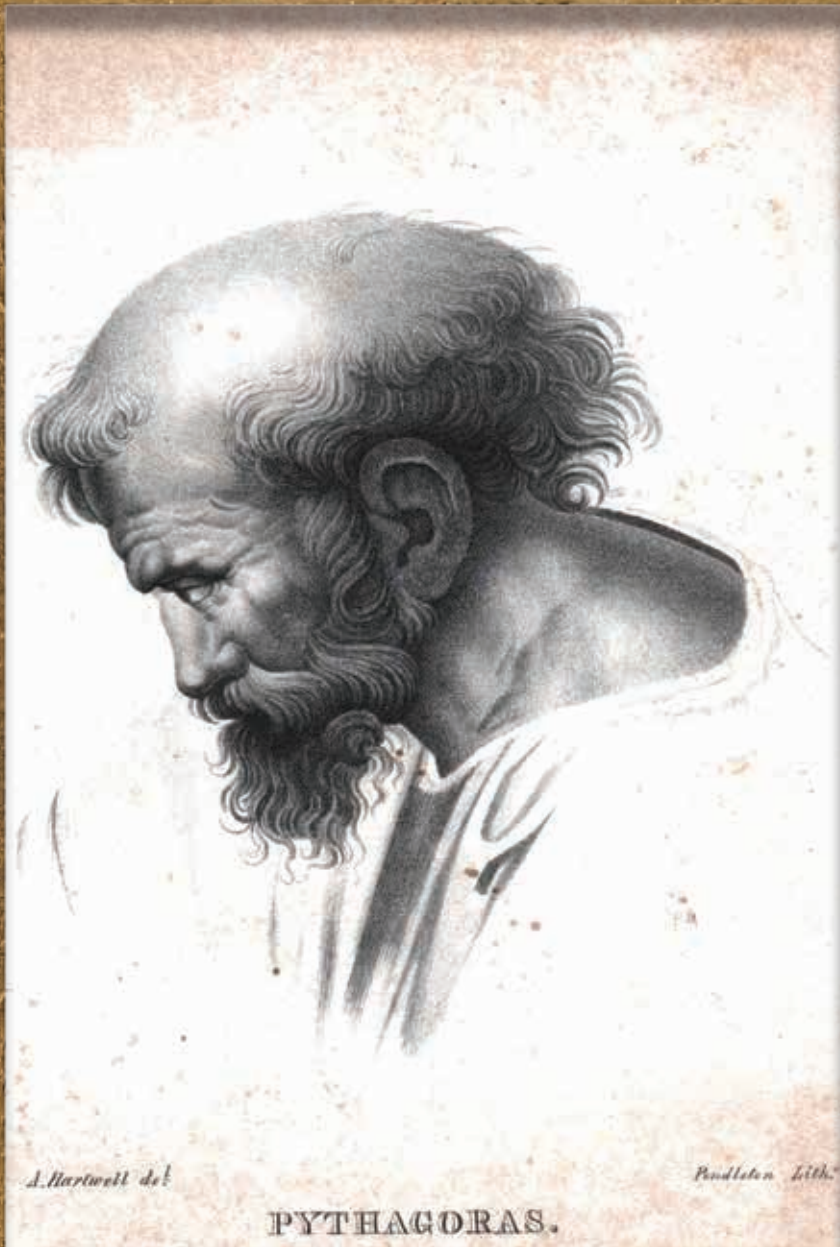
Chapter Four

- The School at Croton.....25
- Fashion in Ancient Greece33

Chapter Five

- Math and Music35
- Music in Ancient Greece39
- Chronology40
- Timeline41
- Chapter Notes42
- Further Reading44
 - Books44
 - Works Consulted.....44
 - On the Internet.....45
- Phonetic Pronunciations46
- Glossary.....47
- Index48

Phonetic pronunciations of words in **bold**
can be found on page 46.



This image of Pythagoras was originally created by A. Hartwell but was made into a lithograph in the 19th-century by American artist John B. Pendleton.

CHAPTER 1

Fish, Bears, and Oxen— Pythagoras and Animals

After a rather rough teaching experience on the Greek island of Samos around 518 BCE, the great mathematician and philosopher **Pythagoras*** (pronounced puh-THAG-uh-russ) needed a change of scenery. He headed for southern Italy. One day he came across some fishermen drawing up their nets along the seashore. The nets were heavy and full of fish. Pythagoras told the fishermen he knew exactly how many fish they had caught. The stunned men told Pythagoras that if he was correct, they would do anything he asked.

The fishermen counted their catch. While no one knows exactly what method Pythagoras used to determine the number of fish, it was shockingly accurate. He asked the fishermen to take all the fish out of the nets and return them to the sea. As the story goes, the fish were still alive even though they had been out of the water for a long time.

Pythagoras knew the men depended on their daily catch as their primary source of income. So he paid them for the value of the fish, then continued his journey. The fishermen spread this

*For pronunciations of words in **bold**, see page 46.



Salvator Rosa painted this large, very detailed canvas titled *Pythagoras and the Fishermen* in 1662. Today it's housed in Berlin's Staatliche Museum.



CHAPTER 1

story. Lots of people wanted to meet this man after hearing about what he had done.

Many people said Pythagoras had a remarkable way with animals, so two other tales from his travels in Italy also involve animals. One had to do with what was known as the Daunian bear. This bear had mauled some people. Pythagoras restrained this ferocious creature and gently stroked it for a long time. Then he fed it acorns and corn. He also spoke to the animal, telling it not to harm other living beings. After this interaction with Pythagoras, the bear hid in the forest and mountains. It ate only vegetables and never bothered anyone again.

The other story features an ox. In the southern Italian city of Taras (now called Taranto), Pythagoras spotted an ox feeding in a pasture of mixed fodder. It was also eating ripe beans. Though he was a vegetarian, Pythagoras strongly disapproved of beans. He spoke to the herdsman who was responsible for watching over the ox. He suggested that the man tell the ox to stop eating beans. The herdsman made fun of Pythagoras's suggestion, saying that he didn't speak Ox. He added, "you're wasting your advice on me: you should warn the ox."¹ Pythagoras approached the ox and whispered in its ear. The ox stopped eating beans and never ate any more during the rest of its long life. People even called him "Pythagoras' holy bull."²

What do all these stories have in common? What do they tell us about Pythagoras? Are they even true?

Whether keeping the fishermen's catch from being consumed or preventing the Daunian bear from harming other creatures, these tales show respect for different forms of life. Though they are documented in a number of sources about Pythagoras, there is no way of knowing if they actually happened. We have no actual writings from Pythagoras himself—no journals, diaries, or letters.

Also, many of Pythagoras's biographers wrote long after his death. One of the most frequently cited sources about Pythagoras is called *On the Pythagorean Life*. Its author, a Syrian scholar named **Iamblichus**, wrote in the late third and early fourth centuries CE—800 years after Pythagoras was alive!

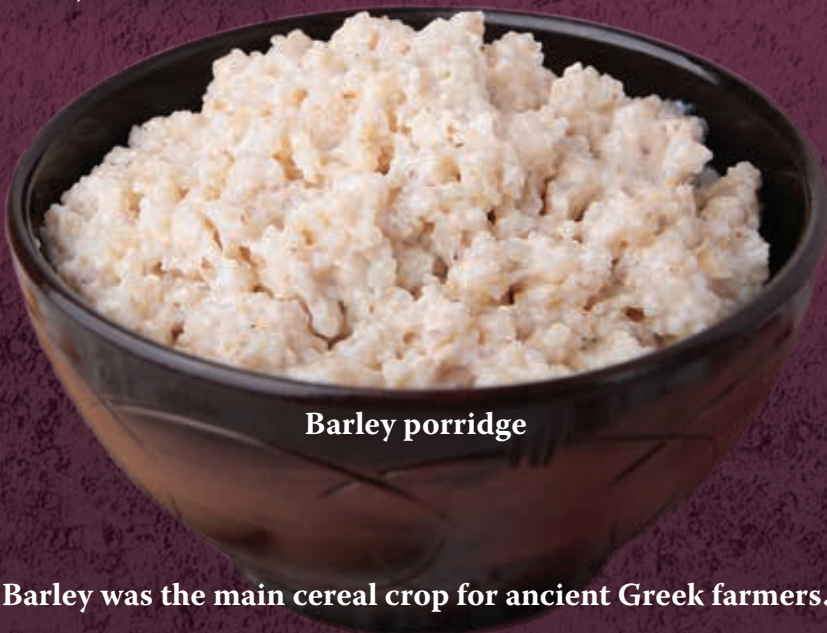
What People Ate in Ancient Greece

Long before the modern era of supermarkets and fast food outlets, many people in ancient Greece provided their own food. Some farmed the land, while others living near the coast fished the seas. They ate quite a variety of foods from day to day.

A common breakfast might have been bread dipped in wine, served with fresh fruit. Lunches were often simple. Bread and cheese would have been a perfectly acceptable noontime meal. Dinnertime was commonly a more hearty affair.

Barley porridge was a popular meal. People also enjoyed vegetables, cheese, fish, eggs, or fruit as part of their dinner. Octopus was one of the ancient Greeks' favorite seafoods. Cooks would smash it against stones dozens of times to make it tender enough to eat. For dessert, cakes sweetened with honey were well-liked. So were figs or nuts as a special treat.

Many sources talk about Pythagoras and his vegetarian diet. But back in ancient Greece only rich people were able to afford meat on a regular basis. For those who did, common choices included deer, wild boar, or hare meat.



Barley porridge

Barley was the main cereal crop for ancient Greek farmers.

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