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PYTHAGORAS-L FOUNDED THE WORLD'S FIRST PHYSICS LABORATORY

In *SCIENCE NEWS*, I. Amato, May 12, 1990, p. 295: "Andrew D. Dimarogonas of Washington University in St. Louis says he has reassembled several lines of historical evidence indicating that Pythagoras -- a Greek mathematician, mystic and cult leader who lived around 580 to 460 B.C. -- set up an acoustics lab in his home....

"Dimarogonas' claim pivots largely upon the writings of the Roman scholar Boethius, who lived 1,000 years after Pythagoras and who probably had access to documents long since lost.

"Boethius recounts a story of unknown origin in which Pythagoras, after going into a metalworking shop, conducted impromptu experiments to learn how different hammers produced specific tones. As Boethius tells it, Pythagoras discovered that a hammer weighing half as much as another produce a note an octave higher no matter what force was used to swing the hammer. Pythagoras also found that other sets of hammers with specific weight ratios produced other tonal consonances such as fourths.

"According to the story, Pythagoras returned home from the shop and conducted experiments into the relationship between objects' physical proportions and the tones they produced. His experiments included plucking strings of different length and widths and hitting vessels filled with varying amounts of liquid. Other ancient authors, such as Theon of Smyrna (2nd century A. D.), offer similar anecdotes indicating that Pythagoreans and other ancient Greeks were not merely head-in-the-sky theoreticians, Dimarogonas asserts in the May *Journal of Sound and Vibration*.

"Dimarogonas summons other evidence from a drawing accompanying Boethius' manuscript. Pythagoras is shown using a hammer to hit a series of hanging bells, while other hammers rest in the pans of a balance suspended from his other hand. To the left, Boethius himself appears with a so-called monochord, an instrument consisting of a single taut string whose length can be varied. The monochord 'was deliberately designed and built to conduct experiments regarding the relation of the length of the string to the pitch of the sound', Dimarogonas suggests.

"He contends that most historians may not be equipped to interpret subtle scientific messages in historical documents and objects. 'Hopefully this work will trigger pure historians to seek cooperation of scientists and engineers in interpreting things that they cannot interpret themselves', he says."

METROLOGIST

According to Pythagorean Aristoxenus the Musician, Pythagoras-L was the first to introduce *weights and measures* among the Greeks (*The Pythagorean Source*

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DIMAROGONAS, A.D.
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