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AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL

THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

ARTIGO | ARTICLE

Pythagoras Traveling East: An Image of a Sage in Late Antiquity

Eugene Afonasin [i]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0623-0574
afonasin@gmail.com

Anna Afonasina [ii]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0812-6789
afonasina@gmail.com

[i] Institute of Philosophy and Law SB RAS – Novosibirsk – Russia
[ii] Novosibirsk State University – Novosibirsk – Russia

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Abstract: Our purpose on the present occasion is to evaluate some ideas the biographers of late antiquity held about the origins of European thought. Speaking about this period we are no longer

dealing with the question of transferring of the archaic practices: these practices are indeed long dead. What we encounter can be better defined as the import of ideas. Equally important is a study of the changing attitudes of our authors: rather than passive witnesses, they became active participants of this import. The process is truly fascinating and we hope that the following examples, mostly from Hippolytus, will elucidate this. The best, almost a paradigmatic example is Pythagoras, who in late antiquity had many faces. His biography is an interesting instance of general change of attitude to ancient wisdom, typical for the source utilized by Hippolytus. Looking at a number of peculiar features of Hippolytus' report which, we hope, will help us to see why the image of Pythagoras and his philosophy, formed by Hippolytus, is somewhat untypical for the period. We will see that Hippolytus' biographic report, however garbled, shows no signs of so-called 'Neopythagorean' biographic development. Admittedly, the later authors frequently combine their sources to make them suitable to their needs, polemical or apologetic. Do we still have a reason to believe that these stories, however doubtful from the historical point of view, may contain the germs of truth?

Keywords: Philosophic biography, Orientalizing motives in Greek thought, reincarnation, secret knowledge.

I. *Mathemata* and Egypt

According to Hippolytus (*Elench.* 1.2.1),[1] "some" say that Pythagoras was native of Samos. The philosophy he originated, –

[1] The work can be dated to the beginning of the third century CE (222-235 CE, according to Marcovich, 1986, p. 17). As far as the personality of the author is concerned we would prefer to suspend our judgment. For details, cf. Cerrato, 2002. The edition used is this by Miroslav Marcovich (1986). An English translation by J. H. Macmahon (1995) found in the fifth volume of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* as well as the one by F. Legge (1921) are mostly reliable although requires corrections in some places.

continues the doxographer, – is called, in contrast with the one founded by the Ionian Thales, the Italian, because it was Italy where Pythagoras, having fled from Polycrates the tyrant of Samos, spent the rest of his life. Towards the end of his report Hippolytus informs us that Pythagoras died "being burned along with his disciples in Croton, an Italian town" (1.16 f.). Only Lysis, Archippus, and Pythagoras' personal servant Zamolxis, "who also is said to have taught the Celtic Druids to cultivate his philosophy"[2] were fortunate to escape the conflagration. Among the Pythagorean *mores* are duly listed the famous principle of common property and their equally famous habit to keep silence for the period of instruction. The Pythagoreans allegedly used to lead a solitary life in underground chambers, "being struck by the plausible, fanciful, and not easily revealed wisdom" of the Egyptian priests, from whom they borrowed their number theory and the system of measuring (*Elench.* 1.2.16-18).

Except to some clumsy peculiarities, this is a well-attested piece of information. Pythagoras' biography in our source is more or less standard to the period. One easily encounters with more fantastic versions, as, for instance, the statement found in Clement of Alexandria, that Pythagoras traveled a lot and even "underwent circumcision in order to enter the Egyptian shrines to learn their philosophy", etc. (*Strom.* 1.69.1 f.).

The "orientalizing" compounds of this version of biography are easily discernable:

1

The opening reservation – "some" (τινες) – is peculiar. Did Hippolytus refer to alternative traditions of Pythagoras' birth, known to him, or, in a recognizable doxographic manner, was careful to preserve all bits of relevant information, simply leaving door open

[2] This remark is repeated towards the end of the book (1.25.1). On the figure of Zamolxis (Zalmoxis), see Eliade & Trask, 1972; and Fauth, 1978.

for other possibilities? For alternative traditions, we have the word of Clement of Alexandria, roughly his contemporary:

> Pythagoras from Samos was a son of Mnesarchus, as Hippobotus says. But Aristoxenus in his book the *Life of Pythagoras*, as well as Aristarchus and Theopompus say that he came from Tyre, Neanthes from Syria or Tyre […] (*Strom.* 1.62.2-3, thereafter Ferguson's transl.).

Aristoxenus (ci. 370-300 BCE) is actually saying (DL 8.1 [fr. 11a Wehrli]) that he was "a Thyrrhenian from one of the islands which the Athenians held after expelling the Thyrrhenians" (trans. KRS). The story is further developed in Neanthes (late fourth century BCE), who says that his father was a wealthy entrepreneur from Syria and frequently visited Italy with the future philosopher (*apud* Porph. *VP* 2). Given that our earliest authorities, such as Heraclitus (fr. 16-17 Marcovich), Ion (DK 37 B4) and Herodotus (4.95) know nothing about Pythagoras' birthplace (unanimously naming his father Mnesarchus), while Isocrates (*Busiris* 28) simply states that he went to study in Egypt from Samos, it is not difficult to perceive the reasons for inventing such a story: supplying new details the biographer explains Pythagoras' long-standing involvement in Italian politics and business, emphasizing at the same time his oriental interests: "so the majority agrees that Pythagoras was of barbarian origin" – as Clement of Alexandria is happy to conclude (*Strom.* 1.62.3).

2

The Pythagorean ties with Egypt is a commonplace, although the reason for keeping silence, given by Hippolytus, is unusual and, perhaps, occurred because of merging of two or more separate reports in one succinct testimony (silence = a solitary life).[3] The same is true in the case of the list of the survived disciples: Lysis and Archippus

[3] This feature is frequently observed in doxographic reports: bits of information in them are easily falling into pieces or blending with each other.

are indeed known to escape the peril (Aristoxenus *apud* Iamb. *VP* 249-251 [fr. 18 Wehrli]), while already in Herodotus (4.95) Zamolxis (Zalmoxis) is reported to be a personal servant of Pythagoras, who is known, being freed, to leave his master and, upon returning back to his homeland, to spread the Pythagorean wisdom among the Thracians. In a sense, he had also escaped from the hands of the Cylonians, which may explain the confusion. On the other hand, an alternative and considerably more popular story that Pythagoras went away to Metapontum and died there (Aristotle [fr. 191 Wehrli]; Aristoxenus *apud* Iamb. *VP* 248-249 [fr. 18 Wehrli]) is surprisingly not reflected in this version of biography.

3

The story about the ways new members were accepted to the community is clearly based on a report, for the first time found in a Hellenistic historian Timaeus of Tauromenium (ci. 350-260 BCE). Pythagoras, allegedly, asked the prospective disciples to sell their property and deposit the money with him for the period of instruction. The accepted candidates consequently held their property in common ("What belongs to friends is common property", κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων, Timaeus, fr. 13a Jacoby [Schol. in Plato's *Phaedrus* 279c]), while those rejected received their money back. This tradition is relatively early and usually considered more or less credible, as well as Hippolytus' repeated statement that the Pythagorean school [4] consisted of two groups of disciples: the insiders ("Esoteric Pythagoreans"), and the outsiders (the Exoteric, also called *Pythagoristae*).[5] This is a sort of statement one would gladly believe, unlike the later tradition about the *mathematikoi* (philosophers and scientists) and *akousmatikoi* (whose, who receive ethical maxims in

[4] Called αἵρεσις (l 4). Compare *Elench*. 1.22-23 and 24.1 where the same term characterizes the Epicureans, the Academics and even the Brahmans. It is save, therefore, to assume, with Mansfeld (1992, p. 11), that Hippolytus mechanically copied it from his source, rather than introduced himself.

[5] τοὺς μὲν ἐσωτερικούς, τοὺς δὲ ἐξωτερικοὺς (*Elench*. 1.2.4); οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐσωτερικοὶ ἐκαλοῦντο Πυθαγόρειοι, οἱ δὲ ἕτεροι Πυθαγορισταί (*Elench*. 1.2.17).

a 'symbolic' manner), for the first time found in Clement of Alexandria (*Strom*. 5.59.1)[6] and fully developed by Iamblichus.[7] According to Hippolytus, therefor, a *hetaireia*, established by Pythagoras, united likeminded peoples, who were initially given a choice to enter the inner circle or to leave it. As such this presupposes no punishment or an idea of "falling away", as it is found, for instance, in Clement:[8] in accordance with this picture, having left the school the '*alumnae*,' well versed in the Pythagorean lore, normally continued to maintain their connections with the former friends contributing in this way to growing popularity of the Pythagorean way of live. Only the most gifted and/or personally devoted minority remained within the school, in a manner, typical of any educational institution. Clement, for instance, thought it was usual for any school: the Academics, the Epicureans, the Stoics; and even "the followers of Aristotle say that some of the works of their teacher are esoteric, while the rest is popular and exoteric" (*Strom*. 5.58.1-2; cf. 5.59.2). It is true, however that excessive dogmatism easily spoils this peaceful picture, if some of the adherents of Pythagoras [the ζηλωτάς as opposed to the listeners, ἀκροαταὶ] prefer *Ipse dixit* to positive demonstration of the objects of their investigation, "holding that in those words there was enough to establish all that they had heard"

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[6] Quoting Homer, Clement prefers to isolate 'two levels of initiation' inside a single Pythagorean School, rather than to see it divided into two concurring camps (*Strom*. 5.59.1): "But the Pythagorean society (ἡ Πυθαγόρου συνουσία) and two-fold communication (διττὴ κοινωνία) with its associates, the majority, ἀκουσματικοί, and the so-called μαθηματικοί, genuine philosophers, signifies that 'something was said openly, while something had to be kept secret' (Hom. *Od*. 11.443)".

[7] This well-known subject cannot be treated here. Lengthy discussions of the sources are found in Burkert, 1972, p. 192-208 and, recently, Zhmud', 2012, p. 169-206; specifically for Clement's reinterpretation of the concept as a good example of a profound change of attitude to Pythagoras and his school, which took place in the process of transition from the Late Hellenistic to Early Roman period, cf. Afonasin, 2012, p. 27-32.

[8] "They say that Hipparchus the Pythagorean was expelled from the school, on the ground that he had published the Pythagorean theories, and a mound was erected for him as if he had already been dead. In the same way in the barbarian philosophy they call those dead who have fallen away from the teaching and have placed the mind in subjection to the passions of the soul" (*Strom*. 5.56.5-57.4).

(*Strom*. 2.24.3). For Iamblichus or his Neopythagorean source this is already a norm, invested with almost oriental entourage:

> Those who heard Pythagoras either within or without the curtain, those who heard him accompanied with seeing, or without seeing him, and who are divided into the "in" (esoteric) and "out" (exoteric) groups are properly not to be considered other than those already mentioned; and the political, economic, and legislative divisions are to be ranked as subdivisions of the same groups (*VP* 88-89, trans. Dillon-Hershbell).[9]

4

Finally, the Pythagoreans are allegedly "borrowed their number theory and the system of measuring from the Egyptian priests". An outline of Neo-Pythagorean numerology, which follows this statement, contains nothing "Egyptian", of course. But to his otherwise typical summary Hippolytus unexpectedly adds an extraordinary statement (repeated verbatim later in the same work, *Elench.* 4.51.8) – a quote, as it turn out, from Diophantus' *Arithmetica*, interpreted as a piece of Pythagorean numerology. This testimony, which may be of interest to the historians of mathematics, deserves a separate treatment (for details, cf. Afonasin, 2016).

Before we proceed further, let us provisionally conclude that the material analyzed seems to indicate that Hippolytus utilized the sources dated to a relatively early period. He gives a list of Pythagorean symbols elsewhere (*Elench.* 4.51.27, etc.), but, as we have seen, knows nothing about the *akousmatics* and *mathematics*. This may indirectly indicate that his source(s) were not influenced by the Neopythagorean biography, clearly reflected in such authors as Clement, Porphyry, or Iamblichus. What is obvious however is that Hippolytus or his source is truly obsessed with Egypt: Pythagoras studied there, he borrowed his mathematics and number theory from

[9] Cf. *VP* 81.

the Egyptians and even an archetype for the organizing of his school is provided by the Egyptian temples.

II. The cosmos as *mousike harmonia* and Persia

Even those who know nothing else of Pythagoras will recollect that he was teaching about the transmigration of the souls. Let us read carefully this part of Hippolytus' testimony.

1

> This philosopher likewise said that the soul is immortal, and that it subsists in successive bodies (μετενσωμάτωσιν). (*Elench.* 1.2.11)[10]

The topic of reincarnation is further illustrated by Empedocles' famous verses "For in the past I have already been a boy and a girl, / A shrub and a bird and the fish that leaps from the sea as it travels" (*Elench.* 1.3.1-3; cf. DL 8.77 = DK31 B117; transl. Waterfield).[11]

[10] Macmahon's translation, corrected. Translations in Kingsley (1990) and Osborne (1987) are consulted. The text continues as follows: "Wherefore he asserted that before the Trojan era he was Aethalides, and during the Trojan epoch Euphorbus, and subsequent to this Hermotimus of Samos, and after him Pyrrhus of Delos; fifth, Pythagoras" (*Elench.* 1.2.11). Pythagoras is reported to recognize the shield of Euphorbus, a Trojan hero, killed by Menelaus, as early as by Heraclides of Pontus (cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.160-164; DL 8.4 [fr. 89 Wehrli]).

[11] Empedocles is a faithful Pythagorean, according to Hippolytus, as well as Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. For details of his doxographic scheme, see Mansfeld, 1992, chapters 8 and 9.

Metensomatosis is a rare word.[12] A more standard term is actually *metempsychosis*, known at least from the first century BCE.[13]

2

> But Diodorus of Eretria and Aristoxenus the musician, assert that Pythagoras went to Zaratas the Chaldean (Ζαράταν τὸν Χαλδαῖον) […] (*Elench.* 1.2.12)

The same personage is also mentioned in 4.23.2: "Zaratas, the teacher of Pythagoras" (Ζαράτας ὁ Πυθαγόρου διδάσκαλος). Other ancient testimonies include Alexander Polyhistor *apud* Clement (*Strom*. 1.69.6-70) and Cyril of Alexandria (*PG*, t. 76, col. 633 C-D, 705B); Plutarch (*On the Generation of the soul in the* Timaeus 1012 E); Porphyry (*VP* 12); *Suidas* (s.v. Pythagoras); Scholia on Plato's *Republic* 600b. Cf. also Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1.2.1; *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 56.13-15 (but it is not clear how Nicomachus understands relations between Zoroaster and Pythagoras); Iamblichus, *VP* 4.19, 29.158, etc.; Julian, *Oratio* 7, 236 D (on Pythagoras and the Magi) and also, in many centuries, Pletho (*ca.*1360-1452), who in his Commentaries on the *Oracula Chaldaica* says, with a reference to Plutarch, that Zoroaster influenced Plato *via* the Pythagoreans, remarking that

> Pythagoras studied Zoroastrianism during his sojourn in Asia among the Magi, the successors of Zoroaster,

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[12] It occurs once in Clement of Alexandria (τὸ περὶ τὴν μετενσωμάτωσιν τῆς ψυχῆς δόγμα; *Strom.* 6.35.1.4, where the Indian philosophers are accused of borrowing their doctrines from the Egyptians), once in the Platonic Celsus (ap. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 7.32.12), six times in Hippolytus and from time to time in later literature, most notably, in Origenes (some 20 times), Theodoretus (6 times), Epiphanius (8 times) and other Christian heresiologists and, quite independently of them, in Plotinus (twice), Proclus (once), Hermias (once) and Olympiodorus (3 times). One may also note Nemesius of Emesa (5 times).

[13] Diodorus Sicullus 10.5.2.8, a pseudo-Pythagorean source, the so-called *Anonymous Diodori*; also a pseudo-Pythagorean *Anonymous Photii* (*Bibl*., cod. 249), *Theolog. arithm*. 52.10, *Suda Lexicon* (on Pherecydes), Alexander of Aphrodisia (in *De anima* 27.17), the *Corpus Hermeticum* (ap. Stobaeus); also notable are Porphyry (once), Proclus (once), Damascius (once), Olympiodorus (5 times), Galenus (once), etc.

> who lived 5000 years before the Trojan War. The latter of these statements may perhaps be doubted, but in any case Zoroaster would be the most ancient of all the philosophers and law-givers whose names are recorded, except for Menos [Menes], the Egyptian law-giver (Anastos, 1948, p. 280 f.).[14]

3

> […] and that he explained to him that there are two original causes of things, father and mother, and that father is light, but mother darkness; and that of the light the parts are hot, dry, not heavy, swift; but of darkness, cold, moist, heavy, slow; and that out of these, from female and male, the entire cosmos is composed. [13] But the cosmos, he says, is a musical attunement (μουσικὴν ἁρμονίαν) […] (*Elench.* 1.2.12-13)

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[14] Who was Zaratas? Emily Cottrell (Humboldt University) asked one of the authors in a letter sent after the Berlin conference on Pythagoras (October 2013) why we are reluctant to identify Zaratas to Zoroaster? She suggested that the transliteration "Zaratas" (to be pronounced Zaratash), could reflect the Aramaic pronunciation of the name, while the Arabic "Zardasht" could reflect the Persian "Zordosht". We are grateful to our learned colleague for these observations. The reason we are 'reluctant' is simple: classical authors placed the prophet Zoroaster in the time immemorial (cf. Aristotle, fr. 6 and 34 Rose) and other writers routinely referred to him in this capacity, including our primary sources: Clement, *Strom*. 5.70.1 (immediately preceding his testimony about Zaratas!), 1.133.1 (in a list of real and legendary persons, involved in divination, which includes Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, Empedotimus, Phormion, Polyaratus, Epimenides, Aristaios, etc.), 3.48.3 (on the Magi in general), 5.103.2 (where Er from Plato's *Republic* is identified with Zoroaster); Hippolytus, *Elench*. 5.14.8 (quoting from a phantasmagoric Gnostic book). It is remarkable that in both cases Zoroaster is utilized by the Gnostics (Peratae and Prodicus, respectively). Cf. Plutarch, *On the Generation of the soul in the* Timaeus, where he first mentions our Zaratas as the teacher of Pythagoras (1012E) and then (1026B) refers to Zoroaster, the author of a teaching on Oromasdes and Areimanius, who (according to his *On Isis and Osiris* 369D-E) lived 5000 years before the Trojan War. Cf. also Diogenes Laertius 1.2 (from Hermodorus) and Pliny *Nat. Hist*. 30.4 (from Hermippus). Thus, this is not a question of a correct pronunciation of the name: a Persian follower of Zoroastrianism can be easily named after the ancient prophet, as well as a Muslim – Mehmed or Muhammad. Be he Zaratas, Zarathustra or Zoroaster, our authors clearly distinguish between the ancient prophet and an alleged teacher of the historical Pythagoras.

We read φησὶν καὶ (Gronov) for φύσιν καὶ: "[…] εἶναι δὲ τὸν κόσμον φησὶν καὶ μουσικὴν ἁρμονίαν […]". The text in Marcovich is the following: εἶναι δὲ τὸν κόσμον κατὰ φύσιν μουσικὴν ἁρμονίαν. This correction is truly unnecessary. Kingsley (after Spoerri) rightly observes that already in Aristotle we read: "καὶ τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν ἁρμονίαν εἶναι καὶ ἀριθμόν" (*Metaph*. 986a), i.e. the cosmos (heaven) *is* attunement.

4

> […] wherefore, also, that the sun performs a circuit in accordance with this attunement (ἐναρμόνιον). (*Elench.* 1.2.13)

If we recollect that the verb ἁρμόζω and its derivate ἁρμονία is traced to the Mycenaean technical term *(h)armota*, which initially meant a wheel with spokes, or a strong connection of the parts (Ilievski, 1993; Afonasina, 2012), we will understand that the next sentence is about the solar wheel (or a chariot), a very ancient image indeed, common to all the Indo-Europeans. As the spokes preserve the integrity of the wheel, *harmonia* holds together all the opposites – male and female, heaven and earth, hot and dry, etc.

In the same manner, in *Elench*. 4.28 Hippolytus says that according to the Pythagoreans the sun, the greatest geometer and mathematician, "is set in in the whole cosmos like the soul in bodies" and in few lines: "the sun makes cosmos numerical and geometrical", dividing it in twelve parts, etc.

Aristoxenus is hardly a direct source of this account, but if something of this report is to be ascribed to him, this should no doubt be the notion of cosmic harmony and its connection with the course of the sun. Concerned with the physical rather than purely mathematical harmonics, the student of Aristotle himself spoke of 'swift' and 'slow' as well as 'light' and 'heavy' sounds – high and low pitches in contemporary terminology.

5

> And as regards the things that are produced from earth and the cosmos, they maintain that Zaratas makes the following statements: that there are two demons, the one celestial and the other terrestrial; and that the terrestrial sends up creation out of the earth, and that this is water; and that the celestial consists of fire with share of air – hot and cold. And he therefore affirms that none of these destroys (ἀναιρεῖν) or pollutes (μιαίνειν) the soul, for these constitute the substance of all things. (*Elench.* 1.2.13)

A correction proposed by Marcovich ([…] τὸν δὲ οὐράνιον <ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου –εἶναι γὰρ> πῦρ μετέχον τοῦ ἀέρος–· θερμὸν καὶ ψυχρόν […]) is not necessary. Some scholars note that a faithful student of Aristotle would say that air is hot and active, while the notion of cold air is explicitly a Stoics view (Chrysippus, *SVF* 2.406 and 429, from Galen and Plutarch). This would rule out Aristoxenus as the author of this passage (Kingsley, 1990, p. 248, n. 18-19). But what if the passage is corrupt and, say, initially contained all four characteristics of the elements: hot, cold, dry, wet, or simply does not consider fire and air as technical terms? Neither the Pythagoreans nor a doxographer who reports their opinions are obliged to follow the Peripatetic, Stoic or, indeed any other elemental scheme. A close parallel is found in the Pythagorean source, utilized by Alexander Polyhistor (*apud* DL 8.26), where hot, dry, cold and wet are simply associated with the seasons: summer is dominated by hot, spring is predominantly dry, etc. and the best season is achieved when hot, cold, dry and wet are perfectly balanced (cf. Burkert, 1972, p. 356 and Plutarch, *Mor*. 128A ff.).

6

> And he is reported to have ordered his followers not to eat beans, because that Zaratas said that, at the origin and concretion of all things, when the earth was still undergoing its process of solidification, and that of putrefaction had set in, the bean <and the man> were <simultaneously> produced. And of this he mentions the following indication, that if any one, after having

> chewed a bean without the husk, places it opposite the sun for a certain period – for this immediately will aid in the result – it yields the smell of human seed. And he says that another proof is even clearer: if, when the bean is blossoming, we take the bean and its flower, and deposit them in a jar, smear this over, and bury it in the ground, and after a few days uncover it, we shall see it wearing the appearance, first of a woman's pudendum, and after this, when closely examined, of the head of a child growing in along with it. (*Elench.* 1.2.14)

The ban on eating beans is probably the commonest of all the commonplaces about the Pythagoreans found in Ancient literature. But the reasons given differ a great deal and the ones proposed by Hippolytus are among the strangest. Usually the authors either list traditional opinions, or try to invent their own. Clement of Alexandria is a good example of this latter type:

> It is said that the Pythagoreans abstain from sex. My own view, on the contrary, is that they married to produce children, and kept sexual pleasure under control thereafter. This is why they place a mystical ban on eating beans, not because they lead to belching, indigestion, and bad dreams, or because a bean has the shape of a human head, as in the line: *To eat beans is like eating your parents' heads*, – but rather because eating beans produces sterility in women (*Strom.* 3.24.1-2).

Compare with this sophisticated hypotheses a simple list, given by Diogenes Laertius (8.34-35), where Alexander Polyhistor, quoting from Aristotle (*On the Pythagoreans*, fr. 5 Ross), relates that abstention from beans is advised either because they resemble privy parts, or because they are like the gates of Hades, or because they are destructive, or because they are like the nature of the universe, or, finally, because they are oligarchical, being used in the choice of rulers by lot (for this latter point, cf. *Elench.* 6.27). Iamblichus in *VP* 61 tells a curious story on how Pythagoras taught an ox to abstain from beans; in *VP* 109 insists on the fact that abstaining from beans

has many unnamed sacred, natural and psychological reasons, and at the very end of his *Protreptikos* gives one more theological reason.[15]

The reasons for the ban given in Hippolytus are manifestly twofold: the first is "cosmological," the second is "experimental", and "scientific experiments" of these sort are actually typical of the heresiologist's gnostic sources. They also do not hesitate to adduce various natural analogies for the sake of explanation. Compare, for instance, the following passage:

> […] if God fashioned man in his mother's womb, that is Paradise, – let Paradise be the womb and Edem the placenta, and the 'river, flowing out of Edem to water the garden' the umbilical cord […] (*Elench.* 6.14).

Thus said Zaratas. A similar if not identical source is independently of Hippolytus used by Porphyry. The information, given by Hippolytus as a continuous narrative, is distributed by the Neoplatonic philosopher according to the internal logic of his work: a much shortened story about Zaratas, with an emphasis on the ritual of purification which Pythagoras allegedly underwent in Babylonia, is found in *VP* 12,[16] while a discourse about beans – in *VP* 44, followed by the same list of Pythagoras' previous lives (*VP* 45).

In his *On the Generation of the soul in the* Timaeus (1012E) Plutarch openly admits that he uses an indirect source and then says that Xenocrates (fr. 68 Heinze)

> […] insert a limit in infinitude, which they call indefinite dyad (this Zaratas too, the teacher of Pythagoras, called mother of number; and the one he called father, which is also why he held those numbers to be better that resemble the monad) […] (trans. Cherniss).

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[15] For this well attested Orphic fragment, cf. fr. 648 Bernabé / 291 Kern.

[16] A story about Astraios and Zalmoxis, which in Porphyry's *VP* goes immediately after his note about Zaratas, has also been extracted from the same source, and vaguely reflected in Hippolytus. Cf. Fauth, 1978.

Having combined this testimony with Hippolytus Harold Cherniss (1976, p. 165, note C; with a reference to Roeper, 1852) concludes that behind an otherwise unknown Diodorus (of Eretria) can "lurk" the name of the Neopythagorean philosopher Eudorus (late first century BCE), frequently used and several times cited by Plutarch. This well may be the case and Eudorus could transmit this information to both Plutarch and Hippolytus. But we must remember that this conjecture cannot be proven.

Also in a heresiological context, Clement of Alexandria does not hesitate to follow a Zoroastrian trace:

> Pythagoras was enthusiastic about Zoroaster, the Persian Magus, and the followers of Prodicus' heretical sect claim to have obtained secret books of this writer. Alexander, in his work *On Pythagorean Symbols*, records that Pythagoras was a pupil of the Assyrian Zaratas (whom some identify with Ezekiel, wrongly, as I shall show presently), and claims in addition that Pythagoras learned from Gauls and Brahmans (Clement, *Strom.* 1.69.6-70.1).

It is safe to assume therefor that our story about Zaratas (if not the entire report) had already been a part of Hellenistic doxographic tradition that reflects a general tendency to find suitable foreign teachers to all Greek authorities. In the same vein, Clement informs us that the teacher of Pythagoras was certain Sonchis, the highest prophet of the Egyptians, while Plato was associated with certain Sechnuphis of Heliopolis, Eudoxus the Cnidian studied under Chonuphis, and Democritus spent eight years with certain "Arpedonaptae" (land-surveyors) (*Strom.* 1.69.1 f.). The source of this cento in Clement is unknown, but can probably also be traced to Hellenistic doxography.[17]

Some parts of information found in Hippolytus are present in other biographic reports, others are quite unique. The source used, as M. Marcovich has shown many years ago, is similar to the one

[17] Diogenes Laertius (8.90) also calls Chonuphis the teacher of Eudoxus.

appropriated by Antonius Diogenes (c. 100-130 CE),[18] but must depend on a much earlier doxographic tradition. The direct reference to Aristoxenus, absent in Porphyry, is especially puzzling. It became virtually a commonplace to deny that the student of Aristotle may author the report. The arguments vary, but the major objections are usually reduced to a claim that Aristoxenus who elsewhere claimed that stories about the dietary restrictions allegedly current among the Pythagoreans are false, could forget about this on the present occasion. But, given that Aristoxenus had written a great number of works of which we possess only a handful of fragments and secondary reports, a possibility that he told this somewhere else cannot be ruled out. Some scholars insist that certain peculiarities of the report are allegedly contain the Stoic and Neo-Pythagorean elements. But this cannot be proven. Finally, some scholars on purely doctrinal grounds say that Aristoxenus cannot believe in such absurd stories. Admittedly, the report suffered changes, but I see no reasons to dismiss it as entirely unreliable.

III. Concluding remarks

We see that for Hippolytus (1) the universal attunement is connected with the destiny of individual soul as well as strict dietary restrictions and (2) it was Zaratas who helped Pythagoras to develop this remarkable philosophy.

Our quote opens with a plain statement that *metensomatosis* is a sort of secret knowledge, possessed by just a few. One has a right to wonder: What is the source of this knowledge? The Egyptians? This is a typical assumption among the ancients, found already in Herodotus, who could be its inventor. The Egyptians, – he says, –

[18] For a comparative study of the parallel versions of this report found in Porphyry, *VP* 44, Lydus, *De mens*. 4.42, and Hippolytus, *Elench*. 1.2.14-15, cf. Marcovich, 1964, p. 29-36. Antonius Diogenes authored a novel, entitled the *Wonders beyond Thule,* presently available as a summary in Photius, where he claims that he has ancient sources for most of his material, but admits that the work as such is his literary creation (Morgan, 1985, p. 482). Cf. also Fauth, 1978.

"were the first to have maintained that the soul of man is immortal, and that when the body perishes, it enters into another animal that is being born at the time…" (*Hist*. 2.123). It is true that the Egyptians believed in immortality of the soul and transformed their gods in animal forms, but the rest is mistaken: they never believed in any form of transmigration of the individual souls. Nothing of the sort, to the best of our knowledge, is found among the Babylonians, the Persians, the Scythians, the Druids, or the Orphics.

In search of a true source of Pythagoras' inspiration, contemporary scholars tend to look at traditional Greek religion and/or foreign practices of ecstasy. A popular theory about Pythagoras' "shamanism" is now obsolete.[19] Living in Siberia, where the shamanistic tradition is still alive and even flourishing (most notoriously, in some regions of Altay, Buryatia and Yakutia), we occasionally consulted the leading specialists in the area.[20] All of them unanimously admit that there are, with few conspicuous exceptions, no signs of reincarnation in the shamanistic religion.

Some form of metempsychosis is present in the traditional believes of the Khanty and Mansi – the peoples of Ugric origin, living in the Northwestern part of Siberia. The first (immortal or collective) soul, or a breath (*lil'*), which is different from the second (personal) soul, or a shadow (*is*), is located in human heart and/or hair (which

[19] Working upon a Russian translation of the *Lore and Science*, we asked Walter Burkert about his reasons for choosing the term. He answered as following: "...Ich brauchte einen Begriff, die Realität eines 'Wundermanns' begreiflich zu mache, während unsere Kultur und Sprache nur negativ belastete Wörter wie 'Scharlatan' bietet; die sibirische Realität war weit weg, ich bediente mich aus Büchern von Eliade, Meuli und Dodds" (a personal e-mail, May 2011). We insist that this arbitrary choice of term is misleading and even harmful, and should be strictly avoided. For an example of a non-critical acceptance of the term even by specialists, see Morgan, 1985, p. 480. In a short study, Anna Afonasina (2007) has shown that the whole structure of shamanistic religion, the social status of a shaman, etc. is completely different from the practices we find on the Greek soil. For one thing, shaman in traditional societies is not a charlatan; he (or she) is a true religious leader.

[20] Esp., those working for the department of folklore of the Siberian peoples of the Institute of Philology (Novosibirsk).

explains the terrible habit of scalping, which the Khanty practiced until the beginning of the twentieth century), leaves body as evaporation, a bird or a gnat and departs to a gloomy place, located in the Lower Ob', which he leaves only in order to enter a new body (a human being, a bear or even a tree). The soul enters the body in birth or immediately afterwards.[21] It is interesting that the twins share just one soul. There are also indications that the souls reenter only the kindred bodies, and when a kin dies out this means the final death of the soul (Ruttkai-Mikklian, 2005).[22] This tradition is certainly too late to influence Greek religion and could itself be influenced by the Buddhists practices.

The Nanais and Ulchi peoples (The Lower Amur) also believe in reincarnation: the soul of a dead man descends in *buni*, where it lives for a long time and, when dies, further descends in *choliochoa*, another underworld inside *buni*, and from this second underworld it reincarnates in this world as a grass, flower, tree, animal or human being. Remarkably, that the souls of those died in their childhood usually returns to their parents. The scholars remark that these views are unique to the region and somewhat similar to the ideas current among the Koreans, which may explain their peculiarity (Smoliak, 1978; Smoliak 1991, p. 123 f.).

Now, a later tradition about Pythagoras adds to the list of places he visited the land of the Brahmans, but no one in antiquity ever connected the Pythagorean psychology with India, although at least from the Hellenistic period the Greeks and Latin authors possessed reasonably reliable information about this country.[23] "Now I must

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[21] For a famous controversy on this matter in antiquity, cf. Porphyry, *On how embryos are ensouled* 2.4.11.2, etc.

[22] We owe this reference to G. Soldatova, a specialist in Mansi mythology and folklore. For a typological classification of shamanistic worldviews, cf. also Kuzmina, 2005.

[23] The major source is the *Indika* by Megasthenes (c. 350-290 BCE). Our sources know about the Brahmans and 'Sarmans', the adherents of the Shramana tradition, later reflected in Yoga, Jainism and Buddhism. Cf. Clement, *Strom*. 1.71.5 and 72.5; Strabo 15.711, 714; Diogenes Laertius 9.61 and 63; and, finally, in greater

dare to speak the truth, especially as truth is my theme" (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c): We think that one has to admit that any feasible theory about the origin of the Pythagorean idea of reincarnation will lead us to the Indians. We may presuppose a direct contact, or postulate some sort of intermediary, most probably the Persians, as did Hippolytus in this remarkable passage. If we are not surprised to find Greek golden pendants in a Hunnish tumulus in Mongolia (Polos'mak et al., 2011, p. 111 ff.), why we are so reluctant to accept a possibility of intellectual contacts between the Greeks and other nations? [24] The place called "Yawan" and an ethnic name "Yawanaya", which scholars interpret as "Ionia" and the "Ionians", are found in the texts dated to the Neo-Assyrian Empire (750-612 BCE). They are presented as seafarers (actually marauders and pirates) living in the far west and treated as enemies. A unique letter, dated to the time of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680-669), mentions fifteen refugees, one called by a Greek name. Some Greeks, mentioned in the documents from the time of the Neo-Babylonian and Early Persian Empires (612-520 BCE), were specialists (a team of carpenters and the workers in a dockyard are mentioned in a Babylonian archive), others seem to have acted as official messengers and diplomats, merchants (delivering purple-coloured garments, raw materials, such as copper and iron, as well as slaves), etc. In Achaemenid period (520-321 BCE) different Greek groups are distinguished by name and the place of origin, and some of them are mentioned as royal subjects. The Greeks are depicted on the walls of

details, Porphyry, *On abstinence from animal food*, 4. Cf. Dahlquist, 1977 (a detailed study of Megasthenes).

[24] Some scholars nowadays are willing to accept this position, as, according to C. Kahn (2001, p. 19, n. 36), did W. Burkert, saying that the Greek and the Indians "had to meet regularly at the New year festival at Persepolis" or A. Bernabé and J. Mendoza, who, after their instructive comparison of the Pythagorean and Vedic cosmogony, with little hesitation affirm that some of this ideas "arrived to the Greeks through direct contact between wise men and priests; but it is also probable that some of them were transmitted through secondary channels, for example by way of traders, soldiers and slaves, in the same way that other fables and folk-tales travel from one culture to another" (Bernabé & Mendoza, 2013, p. 49). A curious instance of a meeting of Socrates with an Indian, transmitted or invented by Aristoxenus (fr. 53) is also in order here (for a recent analysis, cf. Lacrosse, 2007).

the grand staircase of the Receiving Hall of the Great King at Persepolis. They were employed as specialists (for instance the stonecutters, participated in the royal building programs), administrators, mercenaries, or simple workers (including women). A private document from Babylonia mentions the name of certain Bazbaka, "a clerk of the troops and superior of the Greeks".[25] This definitely proves that in Achaemenid period or even earlier the Greeks had already been a part of an essentially multinational society and nothing prevented them from direct cultural contacts of religious and scientific nature.

The concept of reincarnation was foreign for the Greek thought. It appeared among the Pythagoreans and disappeared with the later Platonists. It was imported by Pythagoras who was sent by our biographers first to study abroad in Egypt, where he was able to learn science, and then (*volens nolens*) to Persia, where he was finally able to reach maturity and find answers to the most fundamental questions of being. His horizon expanded, but the Greek spirit of his philosophy remained untouched or as Apollonius of Tyana used to say: "For a *sophos* Hellas is everywhere (σοφῷ ἀνδρὶ Ἑλλὰς πάντα)". [26]

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[25] Abundant data on this subject is now conveniently summarized in Rollinger, 2009.

[26] Philostratus, *Vita Apoll*. 1.34.

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