

Pherekydes of Syros, the Seer, and Pythagoras of Samos

The reputed teacher-student relationship between Pherekydes of Syros and the philosopher Pythagoras supposedly resulted from the views expressed by Pherekydes in his prose work, one of the earliest in Greek literature (see R. L. Fowler, 'The Authors named Pherecydes', *Mnemosyne* 52 [1999], 9). Moreover, Pherekydes' link to Pythagoras is the basis for dating Pherekydes prose work to the mid-sixth century BC. Ancient stories about Pherekydes' prophetic power have been dismissed as later accretions to this theologian's fame as the earliest prose writer and Pythagoras' mentor (See H. S. Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros* [Oxford 1990], 1-11). Yet a review of the ancient testimony regarding Pherekydes and the similarities between this evidence and the stories surrounding the seer Epimenides of Crete suggest that Pherekydes' reputation as a prophet may have the basis for his association with Pythagoras, not his prose work. The image of Pherekydes that emerges from these prophetic stories is much more legendary than his modern depiction as a flesh-and-blood, daring innovator of the sixth century Ionian Enlightenment (See André Laks, 'Écriture, prose, et les débuts de la philosophie grecque', *Methodus* 1 [2001], 131-151). Moreover the Pythagoras to whom Pherekydes was originally linked may have been a tyrant of Ephesos and not the philosopher.

In the fourth century BC Aristotle (F71 Gigon) and his pupils Dikaiarchos (F34 Wehrli) and Aristoxenos (F14 Wehrli) recognized Pherekydes as Pythagoras' teacher and placed them chronologically in the sixth century, but their older contemporary, the historian Theopompos (*FGrHist* 115 F71) described Pherekydes' prophetic powers. Theopompos also reported that Pherekydes was instrumental in the formation of the Spartan ancestral constitution, which according to Thucydides (1.18), was crafted 400 years before his time. Theopompos' testimony indicates that legends about the seer Pherekydes from the distant past are attested as early in ancient literature as those accounts that depict Pherekydes as the teacher of Pythagoras in the sixth century BC.

Pherekydes also bears comparisons with his fellow ancient sage (Diogenes Laertius 1.42), Epimenides of Crete. Both were noted theologians (Eudemos of Rhodes, F150 Wehrli), who possessed prophetic abilities (concerning Epimenides, see Diogenes Laertius 1.114; Plato, *Laws* 1.642d) and were reportedly slaughtered by the Spartans, while their skins were preserved (J. N. Bremmer, 'The Skins of Pherekydes and Epimenides', *Mnemosyne* 46 [1993], 234-36). Epimenides, like Pherekydes was also a reputed teacher of Pythagoras (Diogenes Laertius 8.3). In the case of Epimenides, his association with Pythagoras and the literary work attributed to him resulted from his fame as a seer (Cf. M. L. West, *The Orphic Poets* [Oxford 1983], 47-51). Could not the same said of Pherekydes, whose ancient reputation was so similar? One account of Pherekydes' prophetic power in Ephesos (Hermippos, F17) has a number of shared thematic elements with an account of Vitruvius (*De Arch.* 10.2.15) concerning the construction there of the seventh century BC Archaic temple of Artemis. Both accounts end with the establishment of local cult of *Evangelos*, suggesting that the two stories are alternative foundation legends for the same cult. It may not be a coincidence that the tyrant at Ephesos who ordered the construction of this temple was named Pythagoras (Baton, *FGHist* 268 F2), who was a contemporary of events alluded to in the tale involving Pherekydes. The foundation myth for this cult would have thus served to preserve as a local tradition Pherekydes' prowess as a seer just as did cults associated with Epimenides in Athens (See Diogenes Laertius 1.110).