Herodotus associates the possession of 'wisdom' (sophias) and 'knowledge' (philosopheon) with one who has extensively 'travelled' (planes) to foreign lands.\(^1\) Such a person is counted amongst the sophistai, the wise men or teachers.\(^2\) The Greek philosopher's visit to foreign countries was a doxographical and biographical topos specifically associated with the attainment of wisdom. The philosophical and religious wisdom attained by such travellers was essentially 'barbarian'. As Diogenes Laertius noted, the later Neoplatonic tradition held that the study of philosophy had its beginning among the barbarians... the Persians have their Magi, the Babylonians or Assyrians their Chaldeans, and the Indians their Gymosophists; and among the Celts and Gauls there are the people called Druids or Holy Ones.\(^3\) These marginalised religious teachers and transmitters of spiritual wisdom are associated with the geographical and social periphery of society. This geographical marginality of the wise man is particularly evident in the Neoplatonic tradition of late antiquity; however this notion of the association between the sage and oriental or barbarian wisdom was a concept well established even in early Greek thought.

The figure of Pythagoras provides a model of the paradigmatic holy man who undertakes numerous expeditions with the purpose of attaining the wisdom of barbarian peoples. Herodotus\(^4\) and Isocrates\(^5\) provide the earliest accounts of Pythagoras' journey to Egypt but by the time of the writing of Diogenes' later 'Lives' Pythagoras' visit to Egypt had become canonical. The later Neoplatonic tradition considerably expands the details and destinations of Pythagoras' expeditions to barbarian lands. Porphyry has Pythagoras studying geometry in Egypt.\(^6\) According to Iamblichus, Pythagoras spent no less than twenty-two years there during which time he studied, and was initiated into Egyptian mystery rites.\(^7\) and says that Pythagoras had spent time with the Chaldeans where he studied astronomy and astrology, that the

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7. Iam. VP. 158.
Phoenicians had taught him number theory and arithmetic, and that Pythagoras was also a student of the Magi whose doctrines on the gods he synthesised with his own. Diogenes' account adds to this list the tradition that Pythagoras studied dream analysis from the Hebrews, had spent time in Arabia with the king, and had been introduced to Zarathustra the prophet. Iamblichus' own additions have Pythagoras studying the mysteries of Eleusis, Imbrus, Samothracia, and Delos along with the Celtic and Iberian mysteries.\(^8\) Pythagoras is also associated with the specific religious wisdom of the peoples of the Black Sea region, in particular the Getae and the Hyperboreans, an association Herodotus alludes to through his construction of a pre-existing knowledge in his accounts of Abaris, Aristeas and Zalmoxis.

Chronologically, it is difficult to trace the journeys to barbarian lands traditionally attributed to Pythagoras. Indeed, as Burkert has aptly noted, there is 'not a single detail in the life of Pythagoras that stands uncontradicted.'\(^9\) In the accounts of Pythagoras' journeys to visit the Phoenicians, and the Chaldeans, and of his association with the Magi, there is a good deal of imaginative conjecture. The later Neoplatonic accounts of Pythagoras' barbarian expeditions may be understood as literary embellishments which serve to historicise and therefore authenticate a specific philosophical tradition in which the synthesis of Platonic philosophy with oriental or barbarian wisdom was a well established tradition. The succession of Neoplatonic teachers was authenticated and intensified by the holiness of its initial representatives; the prototypical 'divine man' of Neoplatonic philosophy was Pythagoras, who appears as an enigmatic figure: a philosopher, sage and miracle-worker who travelled extensively to barbarian lands in order to gain insight into various mysteries and oriental religious rites. This Neoplatonic theme of travel reinforces a spatial and experiential analogy: the spiritual journey of the paradigmatic holy man.\(^10\)

In this context it therefore becomes difficult to distinguish the historical Pythagoras from the mythical figure developed from the later philosophical and literary traditions. In attempting to historicise the accounts of Pythagoras' journeys to barbarian lands, both Kingsley\(^11\) and Burkert\(^12\) have demonstrated that he did indeed travel to Egypt and the Near East, but there remains a difficulty in authenticating the other many and varied journeys attributed to Pythagoras. Any attempt to establish the intersection of myth,

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\(^8\) Iam V.P. 151
\(^9\) Burkert (1972) 109
\(^11\) Kingsley (1994)
\(^12\) Burkert (1972).
historical event and literary device encounters numerous difficulties centred on the problem of source analysis. The tradition of Pythagoras' expeditions to barbarian lands has its origins in ancient Pythagoreanism, if not in the historical figure of Pythagoras himself; Platonising interpretation however, brought change to the Pythagoras tradition, so that a historical reconstruction of the situation before Plato's time must be based on the Pre-Platonic evidence. To this foundation the later Neoplatonic embellishments are added, making Pythagoras appear less a historical figure than a pseudo-historical, mythological image.

In examining the earliest accounts of Pythagoras' expeditions to barbarian lands the focus will be on the Egyptian and Scythian logoi of Herodotus which provide significant evidence for the relationship between Pythagoras' own religious teachings and the oriental wisdom of the barbarian lands to which he travelled, or was associated with. The evidence provided in these early accounts reveals the relationship between the geographical or spatial marginality associated with barbarian lands, and the social alterity accorded to the wise man or sage who attains specific religious and ritual knowledge from these regions.

The relationship between geographical or spatial marginality and cultural alterity is a concept evident within Herodotus' notions of geographical and spatial structures, which are themselves dependant on the notion of a symmetrical world. The central aspect of the symmetrical world model is associated with the well-ordered polis, surrounded by concentric circles of geographical regions which became increasingly fantastic. Those regions which lie at the very edges of the world are associated with the idyllic and the utopian: 'the most distant parts of the world, as they enclose and ring the rest of the world seem then to have those things which we think most beautiful and most rare'.

The northern and southern limits of the inhabited world (oikumene), as described by Herodotus, not only show the spatial relegation of the utopian, but also a particular sense of structural polarity inherent in Greek thought. The Ionian conception of the frame of the world places the Thracian and Scythian regions at the northern limits of the oikumene, while the southern symmetrical counterpart to Scythia appears as Egypt. The structure of this symmetry allows for the establishment of a particular relationship between north and south, and for insight into the nature of Pythagoras' association with both these geographical extremities, for the most ancient evidence refers

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14 Hdt. 3.116; see also Hdt. 3.106.
to these two spatial boundaries in relating Pythagoras' relationship to barbarian lands and wisdom.

The earliest evidence for Pythagoras' extensive travelling is found in Heraclitus' polemic against Pythagoras, evidence which is significant for establishing events concerning the historical figure of Pythagoras because of the near contemporaneous relationship between the two philosophers. Heraclitus reveals that Pythagoras 'practised scientific inquiry beyond all other men, and having made a selection of these writings contrived a wisdom of his own.'\textsuperscript{15} The Ionic Greek term (\textit{historia}), used here and in later literature, carries with it the notion of 'travelling and inquiry' and implies extensive investigation and inquiry carried out through visiting different places and peoples.\textsuperscript{16} Heraclitus' criticism of Pythagoras is not of his extensive travelling, but rather of his synthesis of teachings in order to contrive his own form of wisdom. Unfortunately Heraclitus' account does not record precisely where Pythagoras was known to have travelled nor from where he had attained the wisdom which he claimed as his own. It is Herodotus,\textsuperscript{17} followed by Isocrates\textsuperscript{18} and Hecataeus of Abdera,\textsuperscript{19} who provides the earliest evidence that Egypt was his original destination. Scholarship has long been divided over the authenticity of such a journey.\textsuperscript{20} However as Burkert, West and Kingsley have noted, there is at least a strong possibility of contacts between Pythagoras and barbarian lands. Kingsley has demonstrated that trade routes from Samos to Egypt were well established by the sixth century, the earliest evidence for such travel in this direction coming from the seventh century,\textsuperscript{21} so the Samians would have been involved in the inter-cultural exchange of technology, artistic skills, artefacts and religious traditions.

Burkert has argued that an overlooked element of cultural exchange between the Greek and Oriental worlds may in fact be that of itinerant sages, diviners and miracle workers.\textsuperscript{22} Referring to the 'orientalizing period' – the post-

\textsuperscript{15} D-K 129 Some doubt as to which 'writings' are referred to (Kahn [1979] 113)
\textsuperscript{16} Marcovich (1967) 65-69
\textsuperscript{17} Hdt. 2.81; 2.123
\textsuperscript{18} Isoc. \textit{Bus} 28; Isocrates follows the tradition that, within the context of the reported Egyptian piety, Pythagoras sought knowledge of the Egyptian mystery religions. For the difficulties in reading this passage see Livingstone (2001)
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{FGItHist} 264 F25 = Diod. 1 69.4, 96.2, 98.2; Hecataeus of Abdera (4\textsuperscript{th} BC) reports that Pythagoras learnt from the Egyptians both his 'geometrical propositions' and his teaching concerning the 'transmigration of the soul'
\textsuperscript{20} For an overview of the debate see Kingsley (1994) 1-13.
\textsuperscript{21} Kingsley (1994) 1-13
\textsuperscript{22} Burkert (1983) 115-120
Homerian and archaic period in which Pythagoras is historically firmly situated, Burkert suggests that inter-cultural contact may have been stimulated by specific religious and ritual requirements, in particular those associated with ritual purifications. Similarly Martin West suggests that in the sixth century itinerant Iranian Magoi came to Greece, transmitting some elements of cosmological and religious speculations, comparable to the strand of thought identified in Pythagoras' philosophy. Both theses demonstrate the possibility of inter-cultural religious contact mediated through the itinerant sage, and allow for both Egyptian and Babylonian contacts in Greece, and also for the Greek sage travelling to barbarian lands particularly for religious and ritual purposes.

Indeed it is specifically in religious and ritual contexts that Herodotus places Pythagoras' expedition to Egypt. In two notoriously difficult passages Herodotus reveals the traditionally conceived association between the particular religious wisdom accorded to Pythagoras and the Egyptian mysteries. In this account Herodotus ascribes to the Egyptians a fully developed theory of metempsychosis asserting that they were the first to teach that the 'human soul is immortal' (anthropou psyche athanatos). At the death of the physical body, according to Herodotus' report of the Egyptian teaching, the soul enters into 'some other living thing then coming to birth; and after passing through all the creatures of land, sea, and air ... it enters once more into a human body at birth'—a clear statement of the doctrine of the immortality and transmigration of the human soul. However, since the Egyptians had no such doctrine it seems that certain Greek eschatological teachings are here being assigned to the barbarians. Herodotus notes that the Egyptians were amongst the most ancient of all peoples, and their wisdom and piety is therefore accorded considerable honour by the Greeks who accord a certain privileging to the ancient. It may therefore be suggested that the antiquity of Egyptian wisdom and piety allows Herodotus to identify this geographical region as the origin of doctrines concerning the soul.

Herodotus demonstrates the Greek connection of Orphic and Bacchic rites to this doctrine of the immortality of the soul in an ambiguous addition to this passage: there had been a Greek who had subscribed to this doctrine, giving it out as his own. This shadowy individual, whom Herodotus chooses not to name, is identifiable through a reading of a separate passage where Herodotus

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23 West (1971) 239-242
24 Hrdt 2.123.
25 For the difficulty in reading this passage see Burkert (1972) 112, 124-132.
26 Hrdt 2.2.
addresses the relationship between Bacchic and Orphic rituals. Both of these mysteries rites he asserts are in truth derived from the teachings of Pythagoras who had appropriated Egyptian wisdom.

The mysteries of Orpheus, Dionysos and Pythagoras do indeed contain shared elements, including some eschatological mythologies, rites and deities. Most significantly the primary element of the common rites between the three groups involves specific doctrines concerning the nature and immortality of the soul. However, as has been noted, the Egyptians did not in reality maintain the system of transmigration which Herodotus describes and asserts that Pythagoras had adopted. It may therefore be suggested that Herodotus’ account suggests that the Greeks in Egypt associated teachings of immortality of the soul, metempsychosis and some rituals with the religious wisdom of Pythagoras. Similarly, as will be seen, in Herodotus’ Scythian logos the Greeks of the Black Sea region associate the immortality of the Getae with the name of Pythagoras. The direction of the transmission of wisdom, however, is reversed in the case of the Getae. In what may be considered to be symptomatic of the Greek privileging of the ancient over the new, rather than allowing Pythagoras to be the student of the Thracian Getae, members of the youngest of nations, the role is inverted in order to assert the Greek authority over the barbarian.

In his Scythian logos, Herodotus’ accounts of Aristeas, Abaris and Zalmoxis allude to an ancient set of associations between Pythagoras and the Thracian region, in particular the Hyperboreans and the Getae. At the first mention of the Getae, Herodotus adds the descriptive phrase hoi athanatizontas and again a few lines later he says athanatizousi de tonde ton tropon. The terminology is difficult but the term athanatizontes suggests the notion of deathlessness, a concept made much of in Herodotus’ account of the Getae’s attitude toward immortality. The term is significantly ambiguous, and suggests both immortality (that which is not subject to death) and divinity (traditionally the only state able to satisfy such a definition). The Getae Herodotus says believe that men do not die, but that he who perishes goes to the daimon Zalmoxis. Every four years they send the daimon a ‘messenger’ in the form of a human sacrifice. Enigmatically, according to Herodotus’ Greek informants of the Hellespont and Black Sea, this Zalmoxis was actually a human being who had once been the slave of Pythagoras.

27 Hdt 2.81
28 Hdt 4.93-94
29 Linforth (1918) 23-33
30 Hdt 4.94.
31 Hdt 4.95.
The striking feature of the Thracian Getae is their belief in immortality, and this may have been the reason the Greeks of the Hellespont associated this figure with Pythagoras. Indeed there are a number of details of the Pythagoras tradition reflected in the Zalmoxis story, particularly those concerning the *katabasis* of both figures, the role of the subterranean chamber in the ritual, and the doctrines concerning immortality.\(^{32}\) Certainly Ionian customs and knowledge could have given Zalmoxis ideas in other beliefs, but Pythagoras was the authority in questions of immortality and the afterlife. This is attested by Herodotus himself who refers to Pythagoras in this context as ‘not the weakest’ sage (*ou to asthenestato sophista*).\(^{33}\) Similarly Pythagoras’ authority on matters concerning the afterlife and immortality were referred to in the matter of Egyptian religion, as has already been noted. Since the Egyptians were the oldest people, noted for their piety, Pythagoras was perceived as the student of the Egyptian priests and wise men. However, the direction in which the transmission of religious wisdom travels is inverted in the case of Zalmoxis. More barbarian than the Egyptians, Zalmoxis, no longer the Thracian sage, is transfigured: he is the slave of Pythagoras rather than the teacher.

From ancient times Pythagoras, as sage and miracle worker, was associated with figures from the northern regions, in particular Abaris and Aristeas.\(^{34}\) An epic poem by Aristeas of Proconnesus, entitled *Arimaspaea* was in circulation as early as the sixth century.\(^{35}\) Herodotus draws on it for his evidence for the northern regions. The poem, according to Herodotus, told how Aristeas, while ‘possessed by Apollo’ (*phoibolampatos*) had travelled to the far northern regions of the Issodenes, and had learnt of the Aramaspi, the griffins and the Hyperboreans. While Herodotus does not make clear whether Aristeas travelled as far as the Hyperboreans, other sources reveal the mantic capacity evident in Aristeas’ account. This tradition asserts that Aristeas did indeed reach the Hyperboreans through flight, where his ‘soul would leave his body’, and hover about the air ‘in the form of a bird’ and thus allow him to travel beyond the north winds.\(^{36}\) Herodotus supports the evidence for Aristeas’ capacity for bilocation in his account of Aristeas’ death, his

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32 See Burkert (1972) 149-152 for an overview of the evidence for Pythagoras’ *katabasis*.
33 Hrdt 4.95
34 Ap *Herm* 1-6: Epimenides, Aristeas, Hermotimus, Abaris, Pherecydes, Pythagoras; Clem. Al *Strom* 1.133.2: Pythagoras, Abaris, Aristeas, Epimenides, Empedocles; Por. *VP* 29= Lamb *VP* 135: Empedocles, Epimenides, Abaris, Pythagoras; Max *Tyr* 10.11f: Epimenides, Pythagoras, Aristeas. For the ancient origins of these accounts see Burkert (1972) 298-321
36 Bolton (1962)122-134, 181, 193; Max *Tyr* 38.3 cff; Theop. 2.3.89.
reappearance and his vanishing body.\textsuperscript{37} The uncertainties and contradictions of Herodotus’ account of Aristeas’ flight to the Hyperboreans reveals, as Burkert has noted, the lack of a clear conception of the separation of body and soul which are ‘signs of an archaic way of thinking.’\textsuperscript{38}

Pythagoras, like Aristeas, has an ancient tradition of bilocation attributed to him. There is a further connection between Aristeas and Pythagoras however, which lies in the tradition that Pythagoras was himself the Hyperborean Apollo. The \textit{Arimaspea} recounts that Aristeas’ soul had journeyed in flight while accompanied by the Hyperborean Apollo, traditionally understood therefore as the figure of Pythagoras, who had taken on the form of a raven. The spatial or geographical connection between the two figures – in the northern most regions of the Hyperboreans – is emphasised by the connection made by the shared tales of flight and bilocation, the concept of the immortality of the soul, and their ecstatic techniques of mantic capacity. The Pythagorean connection to the Thracian region extends to a relationship with the Hyperboreans themselves, although the relationship is implicit rather than explicit in the accounts of Herodotus which show that the association was well established and had its origins in the earliest Pythagorean tradition.

Amongst the earliest sources of evidence for the Hyperboreans, the \textit{Homeric Hymn to Dionysos} demonstrates that they and the Egyptians were traditionally positioned geographically at the outermost regions of the \textit{oikumene}.\textsuperscript{39} Pindar and Hesiod likewise place the two regions in extreme spatial opposition to each other.\textsuperscript{40} The utopian remoteness of the Hyperboreans is emphasised by a particular other worldliness associated with their geographical and therefore spatial marginality. The Hyperboreans were known to be the ‘servants of Apollo’\textsuperscript{41}: the \textit{hierai geneai} – a sacred race who experience neither sickness nor old age, living in peace without fear of Nemesis.\textsuperscript{42} So far removed from the central regions of the world are the Hyperboreans, that ‘neither by ship nor foot could you find the marvellous road to the meeting place of the Hyperboreans.’\textsuperscript{43} Many of the accounts of journeys to or from the land of the Hyperboreans involve tales of flight as has been noted.

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37 Hdt. 4.13-15
39 \textit{Hom Hym. Dion} 7.28
41 Pind. \textit{Olym} 3.15.
43 Pind. \textit{Pyth} 10.29.
Abaris the Hyperborean was also known for his ability to fly. He was referred to as the Sky-traveller (aithroobates) for, as the story is related, ‘riding on the arrow of the Hyperborean Apollo which had been given him he traversed rivers and seas in a manner walking in the air (aerobaton tropon tina). According to Herodotus, Abaris, while fasting, carried Apollo’s arrow all over the world, however Heraclides says that he actually flew on this arrow and this version is considered to be the oldest. Herodotus’ detailed knowledge of the Abaris story suggests that he would have been aware of this version. If so it may be that the tradition surrounding Abaris was from the outset self-contradictory; those who related the accounts could accept either version. Herodotus was either ready to discard the older tradition involving the fantastical shamanic flight, or it may be that, as with the case of his report of Aristeas, Herodotus lacked the clear concept of the way in which such archaic conceptions of soul flight might be relayed.

The connection between Abaris and Pythagoras, as with Aristeas, is an ancient pre-Platonic tradition. The accounts report that Abaris the Hyperborean flew to Pythagoras whom he recognised to be the Hyperborean Apollo. These flight accounts connected with bilocation, the emphasis upon a particular concept of the soul and the specific religious teachings associated with the Getae, the Hyperboreans and Pythagoras suggest that the Thracian region was known by the Greeks for its particular strand of religious thought, which may be understood as shamanic in nature.

The question of whether the shamanic traditions of Central Asia and Siberia can be said to lie behind certain religious phenomena in ancient Greece is a highly debated issue. The central issue concerning the rejection of such a thesis is that Greek culture is typically and idealistically perceived as a closed system, impervious to external cultural influences. However, as both Burkert and Kingsley have argued, there is certainly sufficient evidence to consider the genuine possibility that certain Greek religious thought had a relationship with the shamanism of the Central Asian regions. The initial difficulty in any such suggestion lies with the term ‘shaman’ itself. However, attention has been drawn to the significance of one particular term – goēs – which may indeed allow for the concept of shamanic activity within the Greek religious world. The goēs was a ritual specialist, a socially marginalised figure connected with the passage between two worlds, those of the dead and the

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44 Iamb, V p. 135f; Bolton (1962) 143
45 Burkert (1972) 150
46 For discussions on the terminology and practices see Dickie (2001); Ciralo (2002); Johnston (1999); Meyer (1995).
living, through flight of the soul and bilocation. Kingsley argues convincingly that the figures of Aristeas, Zalmoxis, Abaris and Pythagoras are the paradigmatic models of the Greek shamanic figure. Burkert likewise considers Pythagoras himself, along with his Thracian and Hyperborean associates, to be a shamanic figure of the archaic Greek world. As he notes, 'for an age that still knew no science, goetes [wizards] and telestai [initiates] were the 'sages' and Pythagoras belongs in this context.'

Therefore, while the later Neoplatonic tradition embellished the details and destinations of Pythagoras' expeditions, the tradition of his journeys to barbarian lands was genuinely ancient. From the earliest accounts, Pythagoras appeared as a marginalised figure, an itinerant goês from the archaic period whose particular religious wisdom was identified as being specifically associated with the immortality of the soul. Pythagoras as the paradigmatic holy man shows the spatial and experiential analogy between the geographical marginality associated with barbarian lands, and the social alterity accorded to those theoi andres whose wisdom is specifically associated with the barbarian other.

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