

*Pherecydes of Syros, early
Western Philosopher*



Pherecydes was the first writer in Greece to explain highly philosophical subjects in prose.

Like Plato and Thales, Pherecydes of Syros and teacher of Pythagoras, obtained his knowledge from the secret books of the Phoenicians.

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (PHERECYDES) XIII pp. 283-85. Frontispiece by Diamantake, 2005. Photograph on page 3, a hollow out in Syros where Pherecydes was thought to have sheltered from cold.

The original MS. of this brief account in H.P. Blavatsky's own handwriting was among the papers of her old and trusted friend, John M. Watkins of London. It is now in the hands of his son, Geoffrey Watkins. Because of the way the text starts, this item may have been intended for a Glossary. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.

PHERECYDES (*Gr.*). A Greek philosopher from Syros, the teacher of Pythagoras. Like the latter he is credited on the concurrent testimony of antiquity, to have travelled many years in the East, to have visited India and Chaldea, and lived in Egypt, where he was the disciple of the initiated priests of the two latter countries. On the other hand, such writers as Clemens Alexandrinus and Philo Biblius, assert that "Pherecydes did not receive instruction in philosophy from any master, but *obtained his knowledge from the secret books of the Phoenicians.*"¹ The latter assertion cannot, however, interfere in any way with the former statement, that which is most interesting in it being the fact that the Phoenicians like all other ancient races had secret books, *i.e.*, an exoteric religion for the profane and masses, and an esoteric system for those who aspired to initiation into the mysteries. Pherecydes is denied by modern Encyclopædists the title of philosopher, because, as alleged, "he lived at the time at which men began to speculate on cosmogony and the nature of the gods, but had hardly yet commenced the study of true philosophy."² This is an error as great as so many others. Real philosophy dates from Pythagoras only in Greece, but was pursued millenniums earlier in other countries; nor would Pythagoras, the "lover of truth" . . . that which he called philosophy, in the insanely materialistic albeit scientific speculations and theories of our modern philosophy, so-called. However it may be, Theosophists may well look up to Pherecydes as one of their earliest Western teachers and authorities, since his work *Eptanuchos* (Ἐπτάνυχος) — which others call *Theocracia* and others again *Theologia* — is the first in classical literature which speaks of reincarnation, or metempsychosis, now so falsely understood; but which was synonymous with the ancients, with rebirth or the *immortality of the soul*. It is by the latter name that Suidas calls the doctrine taught by Pherecydes, and says that it was contained in two books, in which moreover, the septenary principle was plainly taught, though, of course, in more or less symbolical and allegorical lan-

¹ F.W. Sturtz, *Pherecydis Fragmenta*, Lips., 1824, 2nd ed.

² Wm. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, London, 1849, *s.v.* Pherecydes.

guages. Thus he states in Kosmos there are three high principles, which he designates as Chthona (Chaos), Æther (Zeus) and Chronos (Time), and four lower *principles*, the elements of *fire, water, air* and the *earth*. Of these everything visible and invisible in the Universe was formed. He was a great collector of Orphic writings, and his own were extant in the days of the Alexandrian Neo-Platonists. He is referred to by Aristotle as a mythological, and by Plutarch as a theological writer; and mentioned in a great number of classics. Diogenes Laertius¹ calls him a rival of Thales, and some credit him with having been the first writer in Greece in prose, which he used to explain philosophical subjects. There was another Pherecydes of Athens, often confused with Pherecydes of Syros. But while the latter was a contemporary of Servius Tullius,² the sixth King of Rome, and must have lived, therefore, according to the Olympiads, in the sixth century B.C., Pherecydes the Athenian lived a century later being a contemporary of Herodotus. He was a logographer, and has done nothing to merit a place in this work. It is curious that Democritus hints at, and Cicero denounces, the philosophy of Pherecydes and Pythagoras as being “cribbed” wholly from the Eastern systems. The charge is strange since both Pherecydes and Pythagoras never made a secret of the Eastern origin of their doctrines.



¹ [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Bk. I, ch. 11, §116-18, p. 123, in *Loeb Classical Library*, London, Heinemann, 1950 ed.]

² Cf. Cicero and Diogenes Laertius.

Madame Blavatsky defends Pherecydes.

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. X, No. 58, June 1893, pp. 273-83; republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE DENIALS AND MISTAKES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY) XIII pp. 224-42; this excerpt is from pp. 237-38.

There have been use and abuse of Magic in all ages, as there are use and abuse of Mesmerism and Hypnotism in our own. The ancient world had its Apolloniuses and its Pherecydeses, and intellectual people could discriminate between them, as they can now. While not one classic or pagan writer has ever found one word of blame for Apollonius of Tyana, for instance, it is not so with regard to Pherecydes. Hesychius of Miletus, Philo of Byblos and Eustathius charge him unstintingly with having built his philosophy and science on demoniacal traditions. Cicero declares that Pherecydes is *potius divinus quam physicus*, “rather a soothsayer than a physicist”;¹ and Diogenes Laertius gives a vast number of stories relating to his predictions. One day Pherecydes of Syros prophesies the shipwreck of a vessel hundreds of miles away from him; another time he predicts the capture of the Lacedæmonians by the Acadians; finally, he foresees his own wretched end.²

Such imputations as these prove very little, except, perhaps, the presence of clairvoyance and prevision in every age. Had it not been for the evidence brought forward by his own co-religionists, that Pherecydes abused his powers, there would have been no proof at all against him, either of sorcery or of any other malpractice. Such evidence as is given by Christian writers is of no value. Baronius, for instance, and de Mirville find an unanswerable proof of demonology in the belief of a philosopher in the co-eternity of matter and spirit. Says de Mirville:

Pherecydes . . . postulating in principle the primordially of Zeus or Æther, and then admitting on the same plane another principle, *co-eternal* and *co-working* with the first one, which he calls the fifth element or *ogenos*.³ For some time people have wondered just exactly what he meant by that term; however, in the last analysis, the following translation seems correct: “something that constrains, retains,” in one word, *hadēs* or hell.⁴

The first statement is “known to every school-boy” without de Mirville going to the trouble of explaining it; as to the deduction, every Occultist will deny it point-blank, and only smile at the folly.



¹ *De divinatione*, Bk. 1, 50, 112

² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, Bk. 1, ch. xi, 116

³ [Ὠγενός, viz., Okeanos]

⁴ *Pneumatologie*, *Des Esprits*, Vol. III, p. 209

Suggested reading for students.



- ALL AVATĀRAS ARE IDENTICAL, WORLD-SAVIOURS GROWN OUT FROM A SINGLE SEED
- ARNOLD NOT AN INITIATE
- ARNOLD'S LIGHT OF ASIA
- AURA OF THE YOGI IN TRANCE
- BLAVATSKY ON APOLLONIUS OF TYANA
- BLAVATSKY ON COUNT ALESSANDRO DI CAGLIOSTRO
- BLAVATSKY ON DIVINE REINCARNATIONS IN TIBET
- BLAVATSKY ON SCHOPENHAUER
- BLAVATSKY ON THE COUNT DE SAINT-GERMAIN
- BLAVATSKY ON THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN FRATERNITY
- BLAVATSKY ON THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPH OF INITIATION
- BLAVATSKY PAYS TRIBUTE TO ÉLIPHAS LEVI
- BUDDHISM IN ACTION IS UNCONDITIONAL COMPASSION, WISE AND MERCIFUL
- BUDDHISM, THE RELIGION OF PRE-VEDIC INDIA
- BURNET AND BLAVATSKY ON ANAXAGORAS' IDEAS AND IMPACT
- CHANT FOR THE NEOPHYTES AFTER THEIR LAST INITIATION
- DATE OF GAUTAMA BUDDHA'S DISINCARNATION
- DRAWING 1 - FORCES AND STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS
- DRAWING 2 - CHRIST OR HIGHER MANAS CRUCIFIED BETWEEN TWO THIEVES
- DRAWING 3 - NEOPHYTE ON TRIAL DYING IN THE CHRĒST CONDITION
- DRAWING 4 - NEOPHYTE ASCENDING TO THE CHRIST CONDITION
- DRAWING 5 - THE SECRET HEART SEAL
- DUTIES OF A DHYĀNI CHOCHAN
- EMERSON ON PLUTARCH'S MORALS

BUDDHAS AND INITIATES SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- EMPEDOCLES, PAGAN THAUMATURGIST
- ESOTERIC VERSUS TANTRIC TATTVAS (TABLE)
- EVERY INITIATE MUST BE AN ADEPT IN OCCULTISM
- G.R.S. MEAD'S ESSAY ON SIMON MAGUS
- GAUTAMA AND JESUS PARALLEL LIVES
- GAUTAMA BUDDHA BEATIFIED!
- GAUTAMA IS THE FIFTH TEACHER IN THE CURRENT PLANETARY ROUND
- HINTS ABOUT THE TRIADIC HYPOSTASIS OF BUDDHA
- HUMILITY IS NO VIRTUE
- IAMBlichUS ON PYTHAGORAS
- IAMBlichUS ON THEURGY (1915)
- JESUS BEN PANDIRA, THE HISTORICAL CHRIST
- JUDGE ON THE DWELLERS ON HIGH MOUNTAINS
- JULIAN AND SOCRATES WERE PUT TO DEATH FOR THE SAME CRIME
- KALI-YUGA AND THE KALKI-AVATĀRA
- LOHANS ARE THE MELLIFLUOUS DISCIPLES OF TATHĀGATA
- MAGIC OR THEURGY, PURPOSE AND PITFALLS
- MORALITY IS MAN'S PRISTINE EFFORT TO HARMONISE WITH UNIVERSAL LAW
- OCCULT METAPHYSICS UNRIDDED FROM MATERIALISTIC MISCONCEPTIONS
- OVID ON PYTHAGORAS' TEACHINGS AND ETHICS
- PARACELSUS BY FRANZ HARTMANN
- PARACELSUS ON SYMPATHETIC REMEDIES AND CURES
- PAUL AN INITIATE AND FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY
- PETER NOT AN INITIATE AND THE ENEMY OF PAUL
- PLUTARCH ON PHOCION CHRĒSTOS
- PLUTARCH ON THE TUTELARY DAIMŌN OF SOCRATES
- PORPHYRY ON PYTHAGORAS
- PRINCIPLES AND FORCES IN NATURE AND MAN (DIAGRAM)
- PRINCIPLES AND FORCES IN NATURE AND MAN (INSTRUCTIONS)
- PROCLUS ON SOCRATES' DAEMON (TAYLOR)
- SAMSON AND HERCULES ARE PERSONIFICATIONS OF NEOPHYTES
- SHANKARA WAS A CONTEMPORARY OF PATAÑJALI AND HIS CHELA
- THE ADEPTS DESTROY THE WICKED AND GUARD THE PATH OF THE VIRTUOUS

BUDDHAS AND INITIATES SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- THE HOLY RITES OF ELEUSIS WERE ARCHAIC WISDOM RELIGION
- THE INITIATE'S CROWN OF THORNS
- THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY OF BUDDHA LIES IN THE CLEAR APPERCEPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN
- THE LITTLE ONES ARE ABOVE THE LAW
- THE NOBLE GENIUS OF PARACELSUS
- THE REAL CHRIST IS BUDDHI-MANAS, THE GLORIFIED DIVINE EGO
- THE ROLE OF ADEPTS IN THE GREAT AMERICAN REVOLUTION
- THE TRIPLE MYSTERY OF BUDDHA'S EMBODIMENT
- THEOPHANIA AND OPTIONS OPEN TO THE ADEPT
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS – THE AURA OF SUGATA
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS – THE LOVE OF GODS
- THOMAS TAYLOR, THE ENGLISH PLATONIST
- WHY THE SECRECY OF INITIATES?
- ZANONI BY BULWER-LYTTON

