

their *apeiron*, Drozdek's work is an indispensable philosophical reference.

Lincoln College
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Oxford
Oxford OX1 3DR, UK

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A Story Waiting to Pierce You: Mongolia, Tibet and the Destiny of the Western World. By Peter Kingsley. Golden Sufi Center, 2010. Pp. xv + 174. \$35.00 (cloth), 14.95 (paper).

Gregory Shaw

The sixth century Platonist, Hierocles, in his *Commentary on the Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, makes a telling remark, one that sheds light on Peter Kingsley's remarkable new challenge to classicists and philosophers. Hierocles writes:

Philosophy is united with the art of sacred things since this art is concerned with the purification of the luminous body, and if you separate philosophical thinking from this art, you will find that it no longer has the same power. (Hadot 2004, 48)

For Hierocles the 'art of sacred things' is the practice of theurgy, the art of entering profound states of receptivity and drawing divine light into one's subtle (luminous) body. Most readers of this journal have never conceived of integrating their thinking with theurgic practice and, if they have, they have had the good sense not to make such integration public. Peter Kingsley does not share this reservation. His thinking and words have power. These *two* books—for Kingsley's endnotes are like a second book, significantly longer than his narrative and even more compelling—are unlike most academic studies.

We expect authors to take a dispassionate and objective stance and to provide

as factual and as unbiased an account of the evidence as possible. In effect, we expect a lab report. But since lab reports become dull we have also become enamored of elaborate analyses of metaphysical structures that often lead us into the idiosyncratic postures of a postmodern thinker and his/her acolytes. These deconstructions of our discursive frames seem initially exhilarating but culminate in a dead end: their liberating power parasitic on the very discursive frames whose significance they deny. Either way, philosophy has become dull or distractingly meaningless. It has ceased to be a transformative way of life. Peter Kingsley eloquently and directly calls us on our game: we have forgotten how to be philosophers. We no longer have power. We are in the *business* of philosophy. We trade in discursive subtleties and have convinced ourselves that it has ever been thus.

In graduate school one learns not to speak with oracular authority. Peter Kingsley breaks this rule. Instead of pretending that we are all equal and presenting arguments against an objective standard, Kingsley speaks like a guru, *Someone Who Knows*, and this creates resistance. Some in the academy resent his tone: ‘Who does Kingsley think he is, telling me that he understands my area of expertise better than I? How dare he suggest that I have been deceiving myself?’ But Kingsley is arguing for far more than new interpretations. He is suggesting that our entire intellectual edifice is false and needs to be reimagined. This was the theme elaborated in *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* where Parmenides is described as a priest of Apollo, a healer and shaman; and in *Reality*, where Empedocles is described—accurately, we should note—as a sorcerer and self-proclaimed god. The roots of western philosophy, according to Kingsley, lie in ecstatic states of consciousness. The brilliance of the ancient sages that founded western culture arose from shamanic trances and, Kingsley argues, we have been cut off from our roots. Once again, Kingsley returns to his thesis, this time in the story of Pythagoras, specifically Pythagoras’ encounter with the mysterious Scythian shaman, Abaris the Skywalker.

For evidence of Abaris’ shamanic journey and transmission of power to Pythagoras, Kingsley provides a convincing array of scholarship that supports and deepens his story. No less eminent a scholar than Walter Burkert exclaims that Kingsley’s research is ‘rich...dense...admirable, nay incredible, with worldwide scope’. The endnotes *are* impressive. They begin with the mysterious figure of Abaris and his arrow. Extant references are few but richly suggestive: he has traveled far distances, not eating, and carries in his hand an arrow that is said to ‘carry him’ thousands of miles (106). He removes sickness from cities, comes from Hyperborea, the land of Apollo, and is known as Skywalker. As Kingsley puts the puzzle pieces together it becomes clear that Abaris is Greek for Avar, which is to say, Mongol (92), and that he has come specifically to confer on Pythagoras the shamanic transmission that he embodies: the god Apollo. He comes to confirm for Pythagoras that he too carries the Hyperborean god, that he and Pythagoras are avatars of the same deity.

For most academics this story is far more than difficult. It is impossible. We

have long since dismissed the notion that Pythagoras or anyone else can ‘embody’ a god. Such were the beliefs of our credulous and irrational predecessors, certainly not our *rational* predecessors. Great thinkers like Pythagoras laid the foundation for our western culture and to suggest that they ascribed to superstitious beliefs or to shamanic practices would undermine the ground we stand upon. And this is precisely Kingsley’s point. We have lost touch with the shamanic roots of western culture; we have transformed Parmenides, Empedocles, and Pythagoras into exemplars of the kind of rationality that is our stock and trade. But if we read Kingsley’s evidence carefully, it becomes disturbingly clear that Abaris was a shaman who traveled immense distances in a manner that, for us, is impossible. Rather than question our imaginative framework—shaped by our ruling materialism—we dismiss the stories, including Abaris’ healing cities of illness, that fall outside our frame of reference. Of course, we have also cleansed the later Platonic philosophers of the paranormal powers that were integral to their tradition. Marinus’ report that Proclus performed a theurgic rite that brought an end to a drought in Attica (Edwards 2008, 101); Eunapius’ stories that Iamblichus and Sosipatra were able to see events beyond the physical senses (in Wright 1968, 367 and 415; and Plotinus’ awareness that the magician Olympius was casting a spell on him (Armstrong 1966, 32-33) are ignored or dismissed as hagiographic exaggerations. Paranormal powers ‘beyond the reach of reason’ had been recognized by Platonists as a sign of divine presence since the time of Socrates (Plutarch, *On the Daimonion of Socrates* 580F). They were an integral, an *essential*, part of the philosophic life, but because we have made ancient philosophers into mirrors of ourselves we attend only to their intellectual constructs and only to the degree that these are consistent with our understanding. Kingsley sounds a note of profound pessimism about our situation. Even if we acknowledged the influence of shamanic practices and traditions on the pre-Socratics and Platonists, he laments: ‘The vessel of the western intellect is cracked beyond repair, completely unable any longer to contain the fullness of life; and Plato himself, through his rationalizing of older traditions, is to a considerable extent responsible for that fracturing’ (151-152).

Plato’s role in uprooting western philosophy from its sacred sources is a recurring theme for Kingsley and while it is not explored at length in *A Story*, I will return to it. If the ‘western vessel’ is cracked beyond repair, as Kingsley maintains, what of the East? In fact, the most fascinating elements of this book are Kingsley’s explorations of the similarities between the story of Abaris and the practices that continue to this day among Tibetan Buddhists. While merely alluded to in his narrative, these connections are examined with great depth in the endnotes. Abaris’ mysterious walk from the Mongolian steppes to Greece, eating only rarely, is attested among westerners who have witnessed precisely this feat among Tibetan monks. Known as ‘wind-walkers’, these monks practice what is known as *lung-gom-pa*, a kind of meditation that allows them to cover ground at great speed while carrying a small dagger (*phurba*) in their right hand (110-112). It is stunning that no one has noticed that this description matches that of Abaris

perfectly, and the fact that he was a Mongol invites Kingsley to explore how the practices of the pre-Buddhist Mongol shamans were incorporated and preserved in Tibetan Buddhism. As to Abaris' portrayal in western sources, Kingsley argues persuasively that his role as ambassador (*presbeutēs*) was mistranslated by later (Pythagorean) sources as 'old man' (*presbutēs*) (115), thus diminishing the prestige of Abaris despite this being inconsistent with his miraculous travel and healings. Whatever one may think of Kingsley's view of the 'vessel of western intellect' or of our shamanic heritage, his instincts as a scholar are impeccably fine-edged. He is not only an astute philologist but a masterful historian who weaves his insights into a bigger and more meaningful story. In *A Story*, particularly in the endnotes, he makes a compelling case that Central Asian culture was far more connected with the Greeks than has been acknowledged, and that Pythagoras himself traveled to Asia as evidenced by his 'wearing pants', a practice that 'was almost a taboo in Athens' but customary among the steppes of Central Asia (153). As to the influence among Pythagoreans of this Mongol ambassador, Abaris, Kingsley points out that in the Pythagorean school of Archytas in Tarentum, the one visited by Plato, archaeologists discovered a painted image, the portrait of a Mongol (72; 157). And Archytas' flying wooden bird, misunderstood by scholars as an 'after-dinner trick', was likely modeled on the wooden flying bird invented by the Chinese and used for military purposes (157-158). The links with Asian culture are pervasive but we have been trained not to see them.

Kingsley's scholarship is remarkable in his ability to unearth what has been hidden and to turn our habitual assumptions upside down. This is no more evident than in his lengthy endnote #24 (128-143) that could stand alone as a monograph on the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of the *tulku* (the reincarnation of an enlightened lama). The practice of discovering a reincarnated soul through the identification of possessions from an earlier life is not unique to Tibet; it was already evident in the case of Hermetimus, a Greek shaman who was a previous incarnation of Pythagoras (55; 124). Hermetimus pre-dated the Tibetan Buddhist practice by two thousand years, and the practice of identifying reincarnating Tibetan kings existed long before the establishment of the first Dalai Lama, Sönam Gyatso, by the Mongol ruler Altan Khan in 1578. The term, Dalai, in Mongolian means 'ocean', and when the title Dalai Lama was conferred on Sönam Gyatso both he and Altan Khan were designated as *tulkus* (131). The *tulku* tradition was pre-Buddhist, and Sönam Gyatso's first successor was, in fact, a Mongol descendent of Altan Khan (132). As Kingsley puts it, 'the origins of the Buddhist *tulku* tradition lie in the line of kings stretching back to the heart of ancient [pre-Buddhist] Tibet' (138). Kingsley notes that much of this history is written with a strong Tibetan bias that overlooks the violence done by later Dalai Lamas on the Mongol shamans from whom they derived their *tulku* tradition. Nevertheless, the shamanic *tulku* tradition 'ended up becoming exactly what its pre-Buddhist genes always urged it to be—constant rebirth for the magical ruler, with his ancient shamanic powers, over the whole of Tibet' (143).

The Tibetans have sustained a line of shamanic transmission that extends into prehistoric times, a tradition—including the identification of objects from a previous birth—that, Kingsley suggests, filtered earlier into American Indian traditions (143). We have lost that lineage. The vessel of western intellect, Kingsley says, is ‘cracked beyond repair’ and he blames the Greeks and Plato in particular for turning the shamanic path of transformation into mere intellectual exercises. Kingsley here sounds very much like the fourth century Syrian Platonist and Pythagorean, Iamblichus, who also blamed the Greeks of his time (but not Plato) for ‘intellectualizing’ sacred traditions into mere theorizing (*On the Mysteries* 259.5-14). A similar criticism of the Greeks is found in the Hermetic corpus: ‘For the Greeks, O King, who make logical demonstrations, use words emptied of power, and this very activity is what constitutes their philosophy, a mere noise of words. But we [Egyptians] do not use words (*logoi*) but sounds (*phōnai*) which are full of effects’ (*CH* xvi 2, Nock and Festugière 1972-1983, ii 232). Like Kingsley, Iamblichus also praised the unchanging wisdom of barbarians, whom he calls ‘sacred races’, against the instability and impiety of Greek thinkers. The invocations of barbarians cannot be translated without losing their power, for they are adapted to the unchanging gods (*On the Mysteries* 257.11-14). These sacred races of Iamblichus are functionally equivalent to Kingsley’s ‘barbarous Mongol’ who dwells in the place of origin from which civilizations rise and fall (75). They represent the primordial element in us all. But unlike Kingsley Iamblichus saw Plato as a hierophant of sacred mysteries, and Platonists like Proclus said these mysteries were revealed in different modes: Orphic, Pythagorean, Chaldean, and Platonic (Saffrey and Westerink 1968, 20.5-25). For the later Platonists discursive thinking was intended to lead one into the noetic *archai* of thinking, and even their lengthy commentaries on Platonic texts were—as Proclus and Iamblichus maintained—discursive *rituals* intended to evoke a hidden *gnōsis*, pre-conceptual and non-dual (for Proclus, see Rappe 2000, 172-173; on *gnōsis* as non-dual, see *On the Mysteries* 7.10-8.5).

It seems to me that this is precisely the aim of Peter Kingsley, and that he fits into this hermetic/platonic tradition far more than he realizes, whether one focuses on his narrative ‘song/incantation’ (viii, 84) or on the more densely argued endnotes. In Proclean terms Kingsley exercises two modes of mystagogy: Orphic song and Platonic argument, to stir us, disturb us, and ultimately encourage us to find our way back to the place of origin, the unbroken vessel in which each of us is born and reborn.

Department of Religious Studies
 Stonehill College
 Easton MA 02357

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The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics. Two Volumes. By Daniel Graham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. 1020. \$99.00 (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-0521608428.

John Palmer

For more than a century Hermann Diels's *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, with later editions by Walter Kranz, has been the standard collection of evidence for the lives, works, and thought of the Presocratic philosophers. Although Daniel Graham's new collection aspires to replace Diels-Kranz, it actually achieves the more modest yet laudable goal of providing a more accessible sourcebook for English-speaking students. After a preface on the project's genesis and aims, followed by a broad-ranging introduction to early Greek philosophy and its historiography, the first volume comprises fourteen chapters presenting the (mostly) Greek texts with facing English translations of the extant fragments interlaced with a generous selection of testimonia for Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Zeno, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Diogenes of Apollonia, Melissus, Philolaus, Leucippus, and Democritus. Each chapter's texts and translations are preceded by one or two pages of introduction and followed by on average five pages of commentary plus a select bibliography. The second volume continues on the same plan for the sophists, Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon, and Prodicus, plus the sophistic Anonymus Iamblichi and *Dissoi Logoi*, followed by an appendix on Pythagoras. It concludes with a general bibliography, a concordance with Diels-Kranz, indices of sources for the texts and of other passages referenced in the introductions and commentaries, and a general index of names, places, and concepts.