

The Theodosian Age (A.D. 379-455)

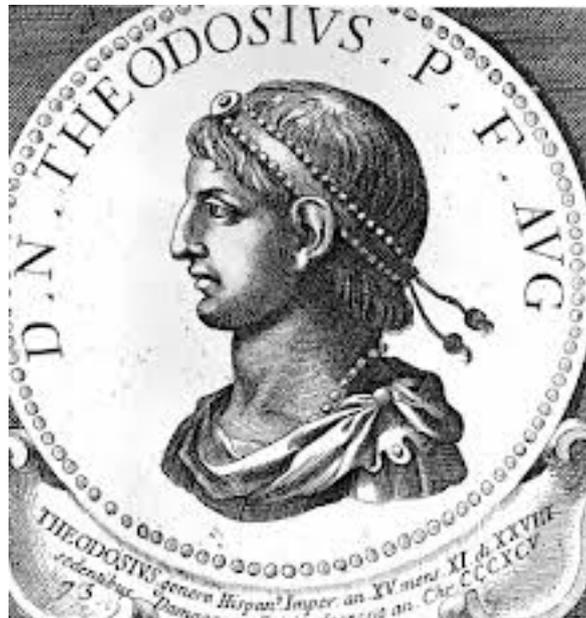
Power, place, belief and learning
at the end of the Western Empire

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Diogenes Laertius between tradition and innovation: philosophers and θεῖοι ἄνδρες*

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Abstract

It has become commonplace for scholars to point out the similarities, as well as the vast differences—despite both works belonging to the literary genre of philosophical biography—between Diogenes Laertius' *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers* and Eunapius of Sardis' *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, which were in all likelihood written in the space of less than a century. It is particularly salient that, although this phenomenon is often backed up by archaeological evidence, the heroisation or even deification of some ancient Greek philosophers in Laertius' *Lives* tends only to be dealt with in the epigrams dedicated to them by the author—the place where Laertius usually expresses his own personal stance and his judgement on the lives and deaths of the philosophers in question. There are scarce few references to this typically Greek religious process in the body of Laertius' narrative, except, tellingly, where this is to condemn it as fraud. As such, this short article looks to explore the somewhat ambiguous mentality, which can be seen to undergo a transformation of sorts, which emerges in Laertius' *Lives* regarding the cult of the philosophers and their divine character. This is presented against a particularly significant historical backdrop immediately preceding the popularisation of the figure of the θεῖος ἄνθρωπος and Christian hagiography, a viewpoint which brings into focus a number of changes and continuities.

KEYWORDS: Diogenes Laertius, pagan holy men, Ancient Greek biography, Ancient Greek philosophers, philosophical afterlife, heroisation, deification, Laertian epigrams

It has become commonplace for scholars to point out the similarities (Watts 2010), as well as the vast differences—despite both works belonging to the literary genre of philosophical biography—between Diogenes Laertius' *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*¹ and Eunapius of Sardis' *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*,² which were in all likelihood written in the space of less than a century.³ However, as is widely recognised—and a first

reading is enough to make quite apparent—the two authors' outlook and intentions vary significantly, the consequence of the diversity of their respective cultural contexts. Indeed, Eunapius seems to have been totally unaware of Laertius' work, and does not appear to have shown the slightest interest in doxographical literature or in the genre of philosophical διαδοχαί.⁴

The most interesting contrast between the two is, without a doubt, the way in which the philosophers that appear in both works are characterised as θεῖοι ἄνδρες—or, as the English language tradition prefers to put it, *pagan holy men*—at a time of wide-ranging cultural changes and radical upheaval which would ultimately culminate in Christian hagiography.⁵ I contend that Diogenes Laertius occupies an ambiguous and uncertain position in this process, one that I will break down in this paper.

In the first place, it is worth noting that there is some evidence as to cases of genuine heroisation—and even deification—of ancient Greek philosophers after their death, through the institution of a cult, or a shrine with an altar, whose existence has also been attested to on occasion through non-biographical documents and archaeological excavations. The most famous example is the cult of Pythagoras in the basilica at the Porta Maggiore in Rome (Carcopino 1926), which inspired Boyancé to write his canonical work about the cult of the Muses in the ancient philosophical schools and the process whereby their scholars were heroised.⁶ Thus, it appears plausible to suggest that the different philosophical schools were set up in the form of a community, with their own rules and ways of life,⁷ based

of the efforts to date his lifetime carried out before the 19th century, see Trevissoi (1908-1909). Eunapius, meanwhile, is generally believed to have lived from around 347-349 to 414, although these dates are far from certain or without their controversy; see Goulet (1980, 60-64), Blockley (1981-1983, I, ix, 1), Banchich (1987) and Penella (1990, 2-4).

⁴ This is made apparent even in the prologue (454); see Goulet (1979).

⁵ Besides the now classic studies by Bieler (1935-1936), Brown (1971), Talbert (1978), Fowden (1982) and Cox (1983), must-reads on this subject include the more recent contributions by Blackburn (1991), Anderson (1994), and the voluminous update by Du Toit (1997, 77-96), who is the only scholar to have analysed Laertius' work from this perspective; however, his account is fundamentally semantic in approach, centring around a commentary of DL VII, 117-119 and not venturing into the areas I explore in this essay. Of course, the characterisation of the θεῖος ἄνθρωπος is outlined extensively in the depiction of Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus, probably written at the beginning of the third century AD, which Eunapius not only knew, but indeed praised (cf. *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, 454), but which Laertius seems to be unaware of.

⁶ On the cult of the philosophers in the context of their schools, see Boyancé (1937, 229-348).

⁷ Pythagoras represents the most explicit case of this, with a fair few prescriptions that are more religious than philosophical in nature (Porphyry, *V.*, XX, XL; Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* XXX, LXVIII, CLXXXVIII, CCXXV; DL VIII, 22-24), and indeed speak of a distinctly communal lifestyle, in which resources are shared out (DL VIII, 10; Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* XXVIII, XXX, LXXIV-LXXV, CLXVII; Porphyry, *V.* XXXIII). Cleobulus also gives a long list of rules of conduct (DL I, 92); Epicurus lives in the Garden with his followers, united by bonds of friendship and by the observance of a range of common prescriptions and customs (DL X, 9-10); and even Diogenes the Cynic sets out a sort of list of rules in relation to behaviour and common lifestyle (DL VI, 31). It can also be inferred that life at the Lyceum must have been somewhat community-like, particularly if one

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¹ Since T. Dorandi's highly awaited edition continues to be just that, I continue to use the edition by M. Marcovich.

² As above, while we continue to await the publication of R. Goulet's much-anticipated edition, I will continue to quote from G. Giangrande's edition.

³ The most recent attempt to place Diogenes Laertius historically is that of Runia (1997, col. 601), according to whom he must have lived, at the very latest, in the middle of the third century A. D. Mejer (1994, 832), simply asserts that “il a pu vivre vers 200 a J-C”. For a summary of all

on the cult of the founding master, which was often initiated immediately after his death (Boas 1948, 449).⁸ Moreover, these communities would then have circulated narratives about the apotheosis of their founders, so as to heighten these figures' (and their own) standing.⁹ In any event, it is clear that the cult of some philosophers did exist and cannot be considered in isolation from the philosophical schools they founded.

In Laertius' biographies, however, it is the closing epigrams, which are normally his own work and only occasionally lifted from others, that most often serve to uphold a philosopher's apotheosis. Indeed, the body of the text includes only sparse references to this quintessentially Greek religious process, and even then this is predominantly, and significantly, to denounce it as a sham. Only a handful of philosophers are considered divine on the basis solely of their life's actions: Epimenides, who is referred to as the favourite of the Gods, θεοφιλέστατος (DL I, 110); Pherecydes, who was divine because he was a prophet (DL I, 116) and spoke the language of the Gods (DL I, 119); Pythagoras, naturally, as ever, crowned by a divine halo (DL VIII, 14 is just one example); Empedocles, who called himself an "immortal god" (DL VIII, 62 = DK 31 B 112), a boast that is picked up throughout the biographical tradition; Democritus, whose predictions earned him fame as ἔνθεος (DL IX, 39); and Menedemus, who presented himself as having been inspired by the Gods when he went around in the garb of a Fury, claiming to have come from Hades to witness everything men did wrong and report these faults to the infernal Gods (DL VI, 102), although in this case these actions were largely and typically cynical and parodic (Clay 1991, 3414-3420).

There are even fewer examples of philosophers explicitly stated to have been venerated with a cult by their fellow citizens: the Cretans offered sacrifices to Epimenides as a god (DL I, 114), while some versions tell the same story about Empedocles, following his mysterious disappearance (DL VIII, 68). Anaxagoras received a sort of yearly cult in Lampsacus (DL II, 14-15) and, according to Aelian (*VH* VIII, 19), an altar was erected for him in the city, upon which the words Νοῦς and Ἀλήθεια were inscribed. The fact that Solon's ashes were scattered around the island of Salamina (DL I, 62) can also be interpreted in this light, according to Farnell (1921, 361).¹⁰ This heroisation is certainly in evidence in the

reads the accounts of the Peripatetics; it is by no means impossible that this was also the case back at the Academy.

⁸ Boyancé (1937, 267) asserts that the funeral elegy dedicated to the memory of the master by Speusippus (DL III, 2) was the catalyst for Plato being viewed in Apollonian terms, thus paving the way for his subsequent heroisation.

⁹ Talbert (1978, 1626) wonders whether "any of the didactic biographies of philosophers or rulers [were] produced, either directly or indirectly, by communities whose existence depended upon some divine or hero figure who was the object of the community's reverence, devotion or worship", a musing he naturally seeks to answer in the affirmative.

¹⁰ "...[it signifies] the desire to settle his guardian-spirit in the island and suggests hero-cult; for the same history is told of Phalanthos at Tarentum, who was heroized in the latter city". Indeed, according to Justin (II, 4), his remains were dispersed in the agora, and the city decreed divine honours for him.

verses of Cratinus, in which Solon himself speaks, explicitly identifying himself with Ajax, the hero-guardian spirit of Salamina *par excellence* (fr. 246 Kassel-Austin):

As men say, I still this isle inhabit,
sown o'er the whole of Ajax's famous city. (DL I,
62; trans. Hicks/Yonge/author)¹¹

Laertius' epigram stresses his extraordinary ability as a legislator, which made him worthy of heroisation:

Σῶμα μὲν ἦρε Σόλωνος ἐν ἀλλοδαπῇ Κύπριον
πῦρ, ὅσα δ' ἔχει Σαλαμῖς, ὧν κόνις ἀστάχυνος,
ψυχὴν δ' ἄξονες εὐθὺς ἐς οὐρανὸν ἤγαγον· εὖ γὰρ
θῆκε νόμους αὐτοῖς ἀχθεα κουφότατα.

The Cyprian flame devour'd great Solon's corpse,
far in a foreign land;
but Salamis retains his bones, whose dust is
turned to corn.
The tablets of his laws do bear aloft his soul to
heaven.
Such a burden light are these immortal rules to
th' happy wood. (DL I, 63; trans.
Hicks/Yonge/author)

As is well known, in Greece it was customary to consider the great legislators of cities their second founders, which is no doubt the reason why many of them were heroised (Farnell 1921, 361), such as Lycurgus, for whom there was a hero cult in Sparta (*CIG* 1256; Herodotus I, 65; Strabo, 366; *FHG* 3, 390; Farnell 1921, 361). This is not the only instance of one of the so-called Sages having an altar erected and temple consecrated in his honour: the same was also true for Pittacus' "Pittacian sacred domain" in Mitylene (DL I, 75) and Teutameum (named after his father, Teutamus) for Bias in Priene (DL I, 88),¹² in all likelihood to reward his services to the country, in the same way as those who had perished defending it were recognised.¹³ Pausanias (III 16, 4) also reports the existence of a ἥρωον consecrated to Chilon, heroised, according to the text, for his vast wisdom (τοῦ σοφοῦ νομιζομένου). It was the same story for Aristotle in the city of Stagira, for which he was a legislator and benefactor (DL V, 2; *Vita Marciana* 17 Düring), just like the Sages in their respective cities: after his death, an altar was erected in his honour in the place where he was buried and this sacred site was given the name Aristoteleum (*Vita Marciana* 17-18 Düring = *Vita Vulgata* 17 Düring). There is no evidence, however, of a genuine cult of the founder of the Lyceum, as can be judged from the instructions left by Theophrastus in his will as to the most appropriate location for the statue of the master (DL V, 51).¹⁴

¹¹ Translated excerpts from Diogenes Laertius' *The Lives of the Philosophers* have largely been taken either from Hicks (1972) or Yonge (1853), with some of my own additions and/or modifications.

¹² Or Biantium, according to *IPriene* (11, 245; 113, 88; 117, 34).

¹³ According to Farnell (1921, 326-327), "the cult is a reward for patriotism".

¹⁴ Boyancé (1937, 316): "Il semble qu'on doive déduire qu'Aristote n'était point le parèdre des Muses et n'était pas à proprement parler héroïsé, puisque son portrait paraît simplement qualifié d'ἀναθήμα".

In all of these cases, one could make the case that Diogenes Laertius stays perfectly poised within the margins of traditional Greek religiosity. There is no trace, however, of traditional-style heroisation narratives along the lines of *The anonymous life of Plato* which, in a manner of speaking, sticks to the canonical form of traditional hero accounts: a woman¹⁵ makes her way to the oracle, most probably the one at Delphi, following the death of the master, to ask whether a stele of Plato should be placed alongside the images of the gods, with the oracle's response in keeping with what we have come to expect on the basis of other such heroisations (*Vita Platonis Anonyma* 218-224):

You would do well to venerate the master Plato,
whose glory is on par with the gods: you will be
due a noble grace
from the gods, amongst whose ranks that man can
now be counted. (trans. author)

It is widely accepted that Delphi often acts as a device to endorse historical heroisations, in a process identical to the one outlined above: the citizens address the Delphic oracle, whose response is that the person in question, often an athlete, must be honoured because he has become a hero who can no longer be found amongst the living.¹⁶ Like Epimenides and Empedocles, Plato was already considered divine when alive, and he is even said to have been of Apollonian birth, although it is worth noting that this motif is only fully developed in later sources, such as the *Anonymous life* or the work of Olympiodorus (*In Platonis Alcibiadem commentarii* 176-178), in which Plato's Apollonian pedigree is foregrounded.¹⁷ Nevertheless, although none of these events appear in the prose, the epigrams cited by Diogenes Laertius (III, 43-44) are altogether explicit with regards to his apotheosis.¹⁸

πρῶτον (*Anth. Pal.* VII 60):
σωφροσύνη προφέρων θνητῶν ἦθει τε δικαίῳ
ἐνθάδε δὴ κεῖται θεῖος Ἀριστοκλῆς·
εἰ δέ τις ἐκ πάντων σοφίης μέγαν ἔσχεν ἔπαινον
τοῦτον ἔχει πλείστον καὶ φθόνος οὐχ ἔπειτα.
ἕτερον δέ (*Anth. Pal.* VII 61):
γαῖα μὲν ἐν κόλπῳ κρύπτει τόδε σῶμα Πλάτωνος,
ψυχὴ δ' ἀθάνατον τάξιν ἔχει μακάρων
υἱοῦ Ἀρίστωνος, τόν τις καὶ τηλόθι ναίων
τιμᾶ ἄνηρ ἀγαθὸς θεῖον ἰδόντα βίον.
καὶ ἄλλο νεώτερον (*Anth. Pal.* VII 62):
—αἰετέ, τίπτε βέβηκας ὑπὲρ τάφον; ἦ τινος, εἰπέ,
ἀστερόεντα θεῶν οἶκον ἀποσκοπέεις;
—ψυχῆς εἰμι Πλάτωνος ἀποπταμένης ἐς Ὀλυμπον
εἰκῶν, σῶμα δὲ <γῆ> γηγενὲς Ἀτθίς ἔχει.

¹⁵ Boyancé (1937, 273) identifies her as one of his disciples, Axiothea of Phlius (DL III, 31).

¹⁶ The most interesting examples, in light of the parallel that can be drawn with Plato, are, in fact, two athletes: Theagenes of Thasos (Pausanias VI, 11, 8) and, particularly, Cleomedes of Astypalea (Pausanias VI, 9, 7), where the oracle offers a very similar response as for Plato.

¹⁷ See also the following clearly biographical utterance: ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν μετὰ τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ τὸ θεῖον αὐτοῦ καταμαθεῖν (*Vita Platonis Anonyma* 218).

¹⁸ On these epitaphs, whose source Laertius fails to cite, see Notopoulos (1942) and Tarán (1984).

First of all (*Anth. Pal.* VII 60):
Here, first of all men for pure justice famed,
and moral virtue, Aristocles lies.
And if there e'er has lived one truly wise,
this man was wiser still; too great for envy.
Another is (*Anth. Pal.* VII 61):
Here in her bosom does the tender earth embrace
great Plato's corpse.
His soul aloft has ta'en its place among the
immortal Gods.
Ariston's glorious son —whom all good men,
though in far countries,
held in love and honour, remembering his pure
and god-like life.
And another, more modern one (*Anth. Pal.* VII
62):
— Eagle, why fly you o'er this holy tomb? Or are
you on your way, with lofty wing,
to some bright starry domicile of the Gods?
— I am the image of the soul of Plato, and to
Olympus now am borne on high;
his body lies in his own native Attica. (trans.
Hicks/Yonge/author)

The epigram dedicated to him by Laertius, meanwhile, is simply a reworking of the famous oracle in which Plato is compared with Asclepius, one looking after the soul while the other tended to the body (Olympiodorus, *In Platonis Alcibiadem commentarii* 176-178), openly declaring him the son of Apollo (DL III, 45):

καὶ πῶς, εἰ μὴ Φοῖβος ἄν' Ἑλλάδα φῦσε Πλάτωνα,
ψυχᾶς ἀνθρώπων γράμμασιν ἠκέσατο;
καὶ γάρ ὁ τοῦδε γεγῶς Ἀσκληπιός ἐστιν ἱητῆρ
σώματος, ὡς ψυχῆς ἀθάνατοιο Πλάτων.

If fav'ring Phoebus had not Plato given to Grecian
lands, how would the learned God
have e'er instructed mortal minds in learning?
But he did send him, that as Asclepius, his son's
the best physician
of the body, so Plato should be of the immortal
soul. (trans. Hicks/Yonge/author)

One might argue then, as suggested above, that Laertius' epigrams accept a form of deification of the ancient philosophers that the prose part ignores or even, on occasion, refutes. The lives —and to an even greater extent, the deaths— of Diogenes Laertius' philosophers are human, all too human, often teeming with defects that are anything but philosophical, and even on occasion even spilling over into the distinctly absurd (Grau 2010).

Other brief indications of hero cult in Laertius include the shrine that Parmenides had built in honour of his master Ameinias (ἡρῶν ἰδρύσατο) following his death (DL IX, 21); or the funeral rites, in the form of decrees and statues, that the city of Athens bestowed upon Zeno of Citium (DL VII, 11-12; 29), which subsequently led to a hero cult of the stoic. At least this is what seems to be implied by an epigram by Antipater of Sidon (*A Anth. Pal.* III, 104) taken up Diogenes Laertius (VII, 29):

τῆνος ὄδε Ζήνων Κιτίῳ φίλος, ὅς ποτ' Ὀλυμπον
ἔδραμεν, οὐκ Ὀσση Πήλιον ἀνθέμενος,
οὐδὲ τὰ γ' Ἡρακλῆος ἀέθλεε· τὰν δὲ ποτ' ἄστρα

ἄτραπιτὸν μούνας εὖρε σαοφροσύνας.

Here Cittiium's pride, wise Zeno, lies, who climb'd
the summits of Olympus;

but ne'er strove to raise on Ossa the pine-clad
Pelion;
nor did he emulate th' immortal toils of Hercules;
but found

a new way for himself to the stars – the way of
temperance alone. (trans. Hicks/Yonge/author)

Another case in which a divine sign accompanies the death of a philosopher is that of Carneades: there was a lunar eclipse, “as if the most beautiful of all the stars, next to the sun, wished to indicate, as one might say, its compassion for the philosopher” (DL IV, 64).

On the other hand, although it is one of the most distinctive and most widely studied (Boyancé 1937, 322),¹⁹ there is nothing in Laertius' *Life of Epicurus* to suggest that he was deified. The full details of his cult were prescribed in his will: the heirs of his school were to make funerary offerings (ἐναγίσματα) to all his family, as well as to him on his birthday, while his own memory and that of Metrodorus was to be honoured on the twentieth day of each month (DL X, 16-18).²⁰ While Boyancé (1937, 324) did not see any sign of apotheosis in this cult, viewing it rather as simply a group whose life, like at the Academy or the Peripatos, was structured around the precepts of a religion (1937, 327), more recent studies, such as the work of D. Clay (1986, 11, note 2), have systematically analysed the cult of Epicurus, confirming that there was indeed such a thing as a genuine hero cult around the figure of Epicurus as a founder.²¹

It seems, therefore, that the philosophers who are subject to a clear apotheosis in Laertius' *Lives* are overwhelmingly the recognised thaumaturges and the founders of the great

schools. Furthermore, while some of their biographies—and the work of other authors on them—contain relatively overt signs of heroisation, this is not the case in Diogenes Laertius.²² As noted above, it is only Laertius' epigrams that include references to the cult and exaltation of some of the philosophers in his work, a feature that remains notably absent from the prose. Moreover, it is worth adding that the image most commonly used to describe this exaltation is that of ascension to the heavens and even rising to be beside the Olympians, as attested to by the various epigrams already cited. It is indeed the celestial element of this type of apotheosis, as earlier pointed out by Boyancé,²³ which represents the real innovation in the hero cults of historical eminences, who cast aside their traditional chthonic character to become celestial beings, a status they attain, moreover, by virtue of their moral qualities. Particularly remarkable in this light is the mention of Heracles in the epigram in honour of Zeno (DL VII, 29): like the Dioscuri and Dionysus, in classical Greek religiosity Heracles occupied an ambiguous position between god and hero, before they ultimately all become actual Olympian gods. In addition to the epigrams quoted above, another interesting example comes with the text Laertius (II, 46) dedicates to Socrates:

πίνε νυν ἐν Διὸς ὄν, ὃ Σώκρατες· ἦ σε γὰρ ὄντως
καὶ σοφὸν εἶπε θεός, καὶ θεὸν ἢ σοφίῃ.
πρὸς γὰρ Ἀθηναίων κόνειον ἀπλῶς μὲν ἐδέξω·
αὐτοὶ δ' ἐξέπιον τοῦτο τεῦχ' στόματι.

Drink then, being in Zeus's palace, O Socrates, for
truly

did the God pronounce you wise, and wisdom
God,

for when thou didst frankly take the hemlock at the
hands of the Athenians,

they themselves drained it as it passed your lips.
(trans. Hicks/Yonge/author)

Here Socrates is explicitly presented as a god who has undergone a celestial apotheosis as a result of his wisdom; however, there is no mention of any sort of cult in his honour, which strikes one as somewhat odd in light of his biographical tradition, in which there is no shortage of testimonies as to his divine or semi-divine character,²⁴ with a particular emphasis on the events surrounding his death.

¹⁹ “Le penseur, qui fut l'adversaire le plus acharné et de la providence des dieux et de l'immortalité de l'âme, est peut-être celui dont les disciples vénéraient le plus pieusement le souvenir”. This is indeed a clear contradiction with the doctrine of λάθε βιώσας, a fact which Plutarch condemns on several occasions (1129a; 1089c). As elsewhere, this veneration comes from the philosopher's work, according to which the sage is a god (*Men.* 124, 134; see also Lucretius III, 322: *dignam dis degere uitam*), in which beatitude predominates (*Men.* 123): it seems logical, therefore, that the disciples would identify the image of the sage with that of the master.

²⁰ For an analysis of Epicurus' will, see Dimakis (1987) and Dorandi (1991). Cicero, too, expressed shock at these prescriptions, and going to no great lengths to hide his scorn (*Fin.* II, 31, 101), while Pliny (*N. H.* XXXV, 5) describes the ritual: *Epicuri uoltus per cubicula gestant ac circumferunt secum. Natali eius sacrificant, feriasque omni mense custodiunt uicissima luna quas icadas uocant*, precisely the ones that *se ne uiuentes quidem nosci uolunt*. See also Aelian (fr. 39), who offers a similar account.

²¹ “The provisions of Epicurus' will as evidence for a cult of heroes among the Epicureans”. This had previously been noted by Deneken (1886, col. 2534). Clay (1986, 27) sees the cults of the statues of the master and the festive celebrations of his *dies natalis* as a proof that Epicurus “was the founder of the cults of his philosophical community and in a true sense a *heros ktistes*, and it is in his life that we see the most eloquent exemplification of the attempt to imitate the divine (ὁμοίωσις θεῶ)”. There may even be archaeological evidence of a place of cult, as can be seen in a passage in Heliodorus (I, 16, 5) which refers to a μνημα frequented by the Epicureans on the outskirts of Athens: this, at least, is how Clay (1986, 26-27) and Clark (1973, 386) see it.

²² Diogenes the Cynic, who may also have been subject to a hero cult, is another interesting case; see Daraki (1986, 99-100) and López Cruces (2004).

²³ Boyancé (1937, 247; 291; 307): hero cult undergoes “une modification essentielle, le jour où elle a cessé d'être une forme plus élevée du culte des morts, où le héros est devenu non plus chthonien, mais céleste”.

²⁴ Indeed, he compares himself to the likes of Achilles (Plato, *Crit.* 44b) and Heracles (Plato, *A* 22a), and asserts that his task is a divine one (Plato, *A* 20e; 21a; 27b; 30c). Clay (1972) develops the idea that Socrates compares himself to a mule (Plato, *Conu.* 221e; *A* 27e) because he sees himself as a demigod, like Achilles and Heracles, i.e., someone halfway between men and gods, just like mules are a cross between donkeys and horses. For the comparison with Heracles, see Loraux (1985).

This process whereby celestial apotheosis is framed in epigrammatic form is particularly common when philosophers have had a violent and thus noble death: their enemies may well have managed to destroy their body, but not their persons. Such is the case of Anaxarchus, tortured to death by the tyrant Nicocreon of Cyprus, for whom Laertius composes a triumphant epigram, emulating the philosopher's own celebrated words: “πίσσε τὸν Ἀναξάρχου θύλακον, Ἀναξάρχον δὲ οὐ πίσσεις”, “Beat the pouch of Anaxarchus, but you will not beat Anaxarchus himself” (DL IX, 59):

πίσσετε, Νικοκρέων, ἔτι καὶ μάλα · θύλακός ἐστι·
πίσσετ'· Ἀναξάρχος δ' ἐν Διός ἐστι πάλαι.
καὶ σε διαστειλάσα γνάφοις ὀλίγον τάδε λέξει
ῥήματα Φερσεφόνη, ἔρρε μυλωθρὲ κακέ'.

Beat more and more; you're beating but a pouch;
beat, Anaxarchus is long housed with Zeus.
And after she has drawn you upon her carding-
combs a little while,
Persephone will utter these words: Out with
thee, villainous miller!
(trans. Hicks/Yonge/author).

This same topos reappears in the epigram in honour of Zeno of Elea,²⁵ another to fall glorious victim to torture by tyrants, this time at the hands of Nearchus; while there is no mention of a celestial apotheosis to the heavens with Zeus, the verses do include the motif of the demise of the philosopher's body as apart from his self (DL IX, 28):

ἦθελες, ὦ Ζήνων, καλὸν ἦθελες ἄνδρα τύραννον
κτείναις ἐκλύσαι δουλοσύνης Ἑλέαν.
ἀλλ' ἐδάμησ'· διή γάρ σε λαβῶν ὁ τύραννος ἐν ὄλμῳ
κόψε. τί τοῦτο λέγω; σῶμα γάρ, οὐχὶ δὲ σέ.

You wished, Zeno, and noble was your wish, to
slay the tyrant
freeing Elea from the harsh bonds of slavery.
But you were disappointed; for the tyrant caught
you and pounded you
in a mortar. But what is this that I say? It was
your body he crushed, not you. (trans.
Hick/Yonge/author)

The cult reserved for tyrannicides was well established in ancient Greece, going back as early as Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who received hero cult in Athens (Demosthenes XIX, 280; Pollux VII, 91). But the same formula is similarly reiterated in the epigrams dedicated to some philosophers who, far from violently at the hands of a tyrant, died a placid and peaceful death, which is regarded equally favourably in the biographical tradition.²⁶ This was true for the scholar Polemon of Athens (DL IV, 20):

οὐκ ἄτις; Πολέμωνα κεκεύθμεν, ὄν θέτο τῆδε
ἄρρωστίη, τὸ δεινὸν ἀνθρώποις πάθος.

οὐ μᾶλλον Πολέμωνα, τὸ σῶμα δέ· τοῦτο γὰρ
αὐτὸς
βαίνων ἐς ἄστρα διάβορον θῆκεν χαμαί.

Can you not hear? We have buried Polemon, who
was here vanquished
by a disease, the terrible burden of humans.
But Polemon was not vanquished, rather his body.
For his self
left this earth as he rose to the heavens. (trans.
Hicks/Yonge/author)

What is more, these epigrams offer a particularly interesting insight from the point of view of biographical commonplaces, inasmuch as they seem to anticipate, at least in their form, the literary formula of the later — naturally celestial— Christian apotheoses, in which the martyr stands firm in the face of torture, proffering lapidary statements at the moment of their death, their soul abandoning their body to rise up to the heavens, the realm of God. Furthermore, in the majority of the apotheoses explored thus far, there is a blurring of the lines between hero cult and divine cult, particularly in relation to the position occupied by gods and heroes in the ancient Greek religious system: philosophers are likened to gods, glorified like gods and, most importantly, as highlighted above, lose their traditional chthonic quality and become celestial. There is unfortunately no space within the scope of the present essay to analyse the nature of this ritual change, which Farnell considered degraded (Farnell 1921, 361),²⁷ in any greater depth, but suffice it to say that the celestial apotheosis of the philosopher rapidly took root as a cliché within the biographical tradition (Holland 1925, 207).

Lucian (*Per.* 39) offers a compelling parody of this cliché in his account of the death of the cynic Peregrinus: when asked by some dullards about his death on the pyre he tells them that at the very moment at which it was kindled an earthquake took place and a vulture emerged out of the midst of the flames, screaming, as it flew off to heaven: ἔλιπον γὰρ, βαίνω δ' ἐς Ὀλυμπον. And, naturally, Philostratus' well-known account of the apotheosis of Apollonius of Tyana takes up the same motif: having entered the temple of Artemis in Crete, the doors closed behind him and a chorus of maidens struck up, chanting: στεῖχε γὰρ, στεῖχε ἐς οὐρανόν, στεῖχε (Philostratus, *V. A.* VIII, 30). As is the case for a range of other ancient philosophers, Apollonius' divine character was recognised even while he was alive (Philostratus, *V. A.* III, 50; IV, 31; V, 24; VII, 11; 21; 31; 38), with the most conspicuous precedent coming with the death of Empedocles: as above, at midnight one of his disciples heard an extraordinary voice calling the philosopher and then saw a celestial light and the glare of torches; thus convinced of the apotheosis of their master, all those present offered sacrifices in his honour like to a god (DL VIII, 68). Later, Diogenes Laertius recounts, his friend Pausanias erected a funerary monument and a shrine for him (DL VIII, 71). The older biographies, however,

²⁵ In truth, as remarked by Dorandi (1994), both accounts draw on the same biographical cliché, and it is likely that Zeno's version is based on that of Anaxarchus.

²⁶ For a categorisation and analysis of the different ways in which the ancient philosophers met their death, see Grau (2010).

²⁷ Indeed, he views the heroisation of real persons as “a new and sudden aberration, a sign of a later decadence in the Greek religious intellect”.

contain nothing comparable to the scene of Apollonius introducing himself to his disciples after his death in order to confirm his new divine status to them (Philostratus, *V. A.* VII 31).

Diogenes Laertius, on the other hand, tends to have no truck with these marvels, going to great lengths, rather, to refute them: this is assuredly the most significant difference between the biographical narration—and, thus, the image—of the ancient philosophers and those of the so-called θεῖοι ἄνδρες. Indeed, Diogenes Laertius favours Hippobotus' account of the death of Empedocles (fr. 16 Gigante), according to which so desperately did the philosopher seek to be considered a god, he leapt into the crater of Etna, only for the volcano to spit out one of his legendary bronze sandals, betraying his real fate; or even that the philosopher had instructed one of his slaves to declare that he had seen him rise up towards the heavens amidst much clamour and glowing lights (DL VIII, 69). Like Lucian's mendacious Peregrinus, whose story we examined above, Empedocles stands accused of having sought to become a god by following in the footsteps of Heracles, through fire (Brelch 1958, 194).²⁸ Diogenes Laertius also has time for Timaeus' account (*FGrHist* 566 F 6), according to which Empedocles died in exile in Peloponnesus, without a tomb, something less than extraordinary at the time according to Timaeus (DL VIII, 71), who lambasts Heraclides Ponticus for upholding the deifying version (fr. 84 Werhli).

This is also the case for Pythagoras, to give another of the most important examples: the idea that he was venerated as a god while still alive only appears in the later sources, such as in the renowned passage in Iamblichus in which he recounts that Pythagoras' disciples ranked him with the gods, viewing him as akin to a benevolent divinity, declaring that he was the Pythian Apollo, Hyperborean or Paeon, or one of the divinities from the moon, or, lastly, that he was one of the Olympian Gods, who had come down to the earth in order to correct the life of the living and extend to them the salutary felicity of philosophy (*Vit. Pyth.* XXX).²⁹ Aristotle, however, asserts that Pythagoras was venerated in Italy even during his time (*Rhet.* 1398b), and it seems that the house in which his disciples gathered in Metapontum was turned into a temple in honour of Demeter, while the garden at the front was consecrated to the Muses (Porphry, *V. P.* IV; DL VIII, 15; Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* CLXX); indeed, it is possible that Pythagoras received a cult in this temple following his death (Boyancé 1937, 234-235).³⁰ The site was still visited as late as Cicero (*Fin.* V 2, 4). Diogenes Laertius, meanwhile, prefers the versions that dispute his divine character, in the vein of Hermippus, who raised doubts about the philosopher's celebrated descent to

Hades (DL VIII, 21),³¹ explaining how the hoax had been perpetrated: he alleges that, as soon Pythagoras he arrived in Italy, the philosopher built an underground chamber, like Zalmoxis in the Herodotean account (IV, 95), and that his mother kept him in touch with what was going on in the outside world by sending him down tablets upon which events were inscribed (DL VIII, 41).³² Hermippus also belies the story whereby Empedocles brought a young girl back to life, asserting that she was in fact still alive when the philosopher found her (DL VIII, 69 = fr. 27 Wehrli = *FGrHist* 1026 F 62). At any rate, Laertius' preference for the less divinising versions of the stories of both philosophers is made suitably apparent, as is his wont, in the decidedly malicious epigrams that he composes for the pair. In reference to Pythagoras (DL VIII, 44) he writes:

οὐ μόνος ἀνύχοις ἔπεχες χέρας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡμεῖς·
 τίς γὰρ ὡς ἐμψύχων ἦψατο, Πυθαγόρα;
 ἀλλ' ὅταν ἐψηθῆ τι καὶ ὀπηθῆ καὶ ἀλισθη,
 δὴ τότε καὶ ψυχὴν οὐκ ἔχον ἐσθίομεν.
 ἄλλο (*Anth. Pal.* V 34).
 ἦν ἄρα Πυθαγόρης τοῖος σοφός, ὥστε μὲν αὐτὸς
 μὴ ψαύειν κρειῶν καὶ λέγειν ὡς ἄδικον,
 σιτίζειν δ' ἄλλους, ἄγαμαι σοφόν· αὐτὸς ἔφα μὲν
 οὐκ ἀδικεῖν, ἄλλους δ' αὐτὸς ἔτευχ' ἀδικεῖν.

You're not the only man who has abstained from living food, for so likewise have we;
 and who, I'd like to know did ever taste food while alive, Pythagoras?
 When meat is boil'd, roasted well and salted,
 then we eat food that has no soul.
 Another is:
 So wise was wise Pythagoras that he
 would touch no meats, but called it impious,
 bade others eat. Good wisdom: not for us
 to do the wrong; let others impious be. (trans. Hicks/Yonge/author)

And upon Empedocles (DL VIII, 75) he wrote the following lines:

καὶ σύ ποτ', Ἐμπεδόκλεις, διερῆ φλογὶ σῶμα
 καθήρας
 πῦρ ἀπὸ κρητῆρων ἔκπτες ἀθανάτων·
 οὐκ ἐρέω δ' ὅτι σαυτὸν ἐκὼν βάλες ἐς ῥόον
 Αἴτηης,
 ἀλλὰ λαθεῖν ἐθέλων ἔμπεσες οὐκ ἐθέλων.
 καὶ ἄλλο (*Anth. Pal.* VII 124).
 ναὶ μὴν Ἐμπεδοκλήα θανεῖν λόγος ὡς ποτ' ἀμάξης
 ἔκπεσε καὶ μηρὸν κλάσσατο δεξιτερὸν·
 εἰ δὲ πυρὸς κρατῆρας ἐσήλατο καὶ πῖε τὸ ζῆν,
 πῶς ἂν ἔτ' ἐν Μεγάροις δεῖκνυτο τοῦδε τάφος;

²⁸ For fire as an immortalising element, see Desman (1949). For Heracles' immortalisation and his role as a precedent for other apotheoses, see Stoessel (1945).

²⁹ See also Iamblichus (*Vit. Pyth.* LIII, CXLIII, CL, CCXXV).

³⁰ This interpretation varies from that of Vallet (1974), who endorses the idea that the later meaning of the word στενωπός as "alley" applies in the context: as he sees it, the Metapontines thus dubbed the street on which Pythagoras' house was located στενωπός μουσεῖος in his honour.

³¹ J. Bollansée's (1999) commentary on Hermippus (*FGrHist* 1026 F 25) is particularly useful.

³² In fact, as Burkert (1962, 155-161), in spite of its distinctly satirical tone, Hermippus' account nevertheless draws on certain ancient archetypes: the instructions Pythagoras receives from his mother are ostensibly really instructions from the Mother, i.e., Demeter, with whom the philosopher remains openly connected in order to travel to Hades. Hermippus likely took an ancient text and turned it into this rationalist caricature. Echoes can also be found in Lucian, *Alex.* IV, 20.

You, Empedocles, didst purge your body in the nimble flame,
 fire thou didst drink from everlasting craters.
 I say not that you threw yourself at once into the stream of Etna's fiery flood.
 But seeking to conceal yourself you fell, and so you met with unintended death.
 And another runs:
 'Tis said the wise Empedocles did fall
 out of his chariot, and so broke his right thigh.
 But if he leapt into the flames of Etna and so took a draught of life,
 how could his tomb then be shown in Megara?
 (trans. Hicks/Yonge/author).

Similarly, there are some cases in Laertius' *Lives* in which the sham is exposed in the nick of time and the philosophers' claims put paid to for all posterity. The most prominent example of this comes with Heraclides Ponticus: according to Demetrius of Magnesia (F 18 Mejer), he reared a snake, aiming to make it appear on his deathbed, so that the multitude who had congregated would think that he had migrated to the Gods,³³ but the fraud was revealed just in time, and Heraclides' name left categorically soiled (DL V, 89-90), a fact also attested to by Laertius' epigram (V, 90):

ἤθελες ἀνθρώποισι λιπεῖν φάτιν, Ἡρακλεΐδη,
 ὡς ῥα θανῶν ἐγένου ζῶδς ἅπασι δράκων.
 ἀλλὰ διεψεύσθης, σεσοφισμένε· δὴ γὰρ ὁ μὲν θῆρ
 ἦε δράκων, σὺ δὲ θῆρ, οὐ σοφὸς ὢν, ἐάλωσ.

You wish'd, O Heraclides, when you died, to leave a belief among mankind,
 that you, when dead, a serpent had become.
 But you were deceived, you sophist, for this your serpent was indeed a beast,
 and you were thus discovered and pronounced another. (trans. Hicks/Yonge/author)

Hermippus' version (fr. 42 Wehrli = *FGrHist* 1026 F 71) is even more outlandish, Heraclides going as far as to bribe the Pythian priestess to proclaim that the citizens should present the philosopher with a golden crown while alive, and then pay him honours as a hero upon his death. However, just as Heraclides is being crowned in the theatre, he is beset by a sudden apoplexy and drops dead, the ambassadors he had sent to consult the oracle are stoned to death, while the Pythian priestess is killed having been bitten by a snake within the shrine (DL V, 91). Lucian's account of the death of the false prophet Alexander is yet more scathing still: he refuses to countenance the suggestion of even a hint of divine retribution in his sudden death, but rather, picking up where Heracles left off, states that it must be put down to pure chance (*Alex.* 60).

In conclusion, therefore, it can be stated that in the Greek religious and biographical tradition, there was a tendency

³³ Literally, to pretend that he had left to be with the gods, ἵνα δόξειεν εἰς θεοὺς μεταβεβηκέναι. This clearly parodic scene also takes us back to the celestial, rather than chthonic, notion of the hero, as discussed above. The device of heroisation through the presence of a snake, however, remains a chthonic and traditional one; see Farnell (1921, 366), Brelich (1958, 220-222) and Burkert (1985, 195; 201).

to subject the ancient philosophers to the same hero cult as so many other historical characters; in particular legislators, athletes and citizens who died defending the country, such as tyrannicides, as well as poets, with whom they indeed display the greatest similarity, since both groups were heroised on the basis of their work and their cult originated within a defined community.³⁴ In this regard, Laertius' biographical accounts in prose fail to deviate from the traditional canons and conventions, although they do, on some specific occasions, successfully debunk ostensible apotheoses. It is in the epigrams, meanwhile, that Laertius gives pride of place to any innovations, particularly in reference to the formulation of the divine apotheosis of θεῖοι ἄνδρες as heavenly ascent. Bearing in mind that the epigrams are the place in which Laertius tends to issue his final personal judgement on the life and death of the philosophers covered in the prose biographies,³⁵ it is not too great a leap to suggest that they are also the site in which the new schools of thought prevalent in his time make themselves felt most acutely, while the rest of his *oeuvre* continues to conform to the tradition that underscores his sources, which in turn draw exclusively from the work of philosophers from before the first century AD. Indeed, there is no shortage of interesting departures from tradition: neither Pythagoras nor Epicurus, nor other philosophers whose deification is commonplace in later sources, are explicitly deified, or even heroised, in Diogenes Laertius' work. One could say, therefore, that Laertius does not seem to have shared the penchant for thaumaturgy, conjecture and fantastical narratives that were to become all the rage amongst the public that consumed the biographies of philosophers and hagiographies.³⁶

³⁴ As well as the evidence presented by Farnell (1921), more recently Clay (2004, 127-153), explores the evidence of cults of poets, thereby demonstrating that there were no cultic differences where poets and philosophers were concerned. Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1398b), meanwhile, offers a highly interesting inventory of real persons who were the subject of a cult in their time, including —and hardly coincidentally—poets and philosophers, both honoured on account of their wisdom.

³⁵ Indeed, the epigrams added by Laertius at the end of most of his biographies are the place where it is easiest to glean the author's sympathy for or aversion to the respective philosophers: they represent without a doubt the most personal part of his work, as they are purely products of his own creativity and he often uses them to clarify which of the conflicting versions set out in the prose he favours, or simply to offer a definitive and categorical verdict on each philosopher (Veillard 2009, 78-79). For a systematic analysis of this device, I refer to Grau (2010).

³⁶ In this regard, I broadly agree with Veillard (2009, 82-87), which is indeed consistent with the more extensive treatment of the subject in Grau (2009, 289-297). Nevertheless, I believe that this essay serves to qualify his hypotheses in some respects.