

The Atheist Writings of Diagoras of Melos

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## The Atheist Writings of Diagoras of Melos

### New Approaches to the Authenticity of “*Phrygioi Logoi*” and “*Apopyrgizontes Logoi*”

The sophist Diagoras of Melos (c. 470 – c. 400 BC) was one of the best-known “atheists” of the classical period.<sup>1</sup> According to many ancient authors,<sup>2</sup> Diagoras rejected any belief in the gods. For these authors, his derision and disclosure of the Eleusinian Mysteries provided proof of this,<sup>3</sup> but Philodemus<sup>4</sup> also stresses the importance of his atheist writings in which he apparently divulged his views.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the fact that not a single word of these writings has survived and the relative lateness of the sources which identify his books as *Phrygioi Logoi* or *Apopyrgizontes Logoi*, the literary output of Diagoras with its reputed focus on the denial of the gods remains a matter of debate.<sup>6</sup> In this article, I shall assess the

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<sup>1</sup> The degree to which ancient Greek atheism is comparable to modern atheism is debated: see E. FRANK, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth*, Oxford, 1949, p. 32; H.D. RANKIN, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics*, Beckenham, 1983, p. 135; G. HYMAN, “Atheism in Modern History,” in M. MARTIN (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 27-28; G. HYMAN, *A Short History of Atheism*, London, 2010, p. 2-3, 43-45.

<sup>2</sup> CICERO, *On the Nature of the Gods* I, 1; PLUTARCH, *On Superstition*, 13; SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III, 218-219.

<sup>3</sup> MELANTHIUS, 326 F3 Jacoby; CRATERUS, 342 F16 Jacoby. See also J.N. BREMMER, “Religious Secrets and Secrecy in Classical Greece,” in H.G. KIPPENBERG & G. STROUMSA (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment: the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Leiden, 1995, p. 75; R. PARKER, *Athenian Religion. A History*, Oxford, 1996, p. 208, n. 37 for a concise overview of ancient evidence and modern research on the atheism of Diagoras. All existing sources on Diagoras have been collected by M. WINIARCZYK, *Diagorae Melii et Theodori Cyrenaei Reliquiae*, Leipzig, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> On the nature of the atheist book of Diagoras, see PHILODEMUS, *On Piety*, P. Herc. 1077, col. 82.5-18 (on authority of Epicurus) and P.Herc. 1428, col. 11-12 (on authority of Aristoxenus). See also F. WEHRLI, *Die Schule des Aristoteles (Texte und Kommentar): Aristoxenos*, Basel/Stuttgart, 1967, p. 22 (fr. 45), p. 63; A. HENRICH, “Die Kritik der stoischen Theologie im Pherc.1428,” *CErc* 4 (1974), p. 28; WINIARCZYK, *o.c.* (n. 3), p. 13 (Diagoras T39), p. 21-22 (Diagoras T69); D. OBBINK, *Philodemus on Piety (Part 1)*, Oxford, 1996, p. 142-143.

<sup>5</sup> OBBINK, *o.c.* (n. 4), p. 352-353; D. OBBINK, “‘All Gods are True’ in Epicurus,” in D. FREDE & A. LAKS (eds.), *Traditions of Theology. Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath*, Leiden, 2002, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> R. JANKO, “The Derveni Papyrus (Diagoras of Melos, Apopyrgizontes Logoi?): a New Translation,” *CPh* 96 (2001), p. 1-6; R. JANKO, “Socrates the Freethinker,” in S. AHBEL-RAPPE & R. KAMTEKAR (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, Malden MA, 2006, p. 56 identify Diagoras as the author of the Derveni Papyrus, an idea that is refuted by G. BETEGH, *The Derveni*

historical validity of the preserved titles, and I shall suggest a more “generic” title for the work composed by Diagoras.

### 1. The atheist writings of Diagoras

Regarding the atheist writings by Diagoras, ancient evidence attests two different titles, namely Φρῦγιοὶ λόγοι and Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι. It is unlikely that these titles correspond to two separate books. Rather, we are dealing with two separate titles for one book.<sup>7</sup> In Antiquity authors did not necessarily give their treatises a proper title and titles were often provided by later readers in order to specify the content of the work.<sup>8</sup> As a result, ancient sources could report more than one title for a specific work. One particular treatise of Protagoras, for example, was referred to as Ἀλήθεια (“Truth”) by Plato or Καταβάλλοντες λόγοι (“Knockdown Arguments”) by Sextus Empiricus, while Diogenes Laertius identified this work as Ἀντιλογικά (“Opposing Arguments”).<sup>9</sup> It seems likely that the case of Diagoras is similar, as all sources for the attested titles are late and no author seems to know two distinct works by Diagoras. Let us now look at each of the two titles in detail.

#### 1.1 Φρῦγιοὶ λόγοι

The oldest source that mentions a title for the work of Diagoras of Melos is Tatian, a Christian apologist from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. In his *Address to the Greeks*, Tatian criticizes the hypocrisy of the polytheists. On the one hand, they accuse Christians of atheism, but, on the other hand, they eagerly read atheist writings. Tatian remarks that:

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*Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation. A Preliminary Reading, Critical Edition and Translation*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 373-380; T. KOUREMENOS, G.M. PARASSOGLU & G.M. TSANTSANOGLU, *The Derveni Papyrus*, Firenze, 2006, p. 58-59.

<sup>7</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars such as F.V. FRITZSCHE, *Aristophanis Ranae*, Turin, 1845, p. 183 and T. MÜNCHENBERG, *De Diagora Melio*, Halle/Saale, 1877, p. 23-25 argued that Φρῦγιοὶ λόγοι as an atheist book by Diagoras must be separated from the so-called Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι. The first would have only concerned the defamation of the Mysteries of Eleusis, while the second focused on the denial of divine existence. The evidence for this argumentation is only indirectly based on the testimony of TATIAN, *Address to the Greeks*, 27 and is therefore very weak.

<sup>8</sup> On this matter, see E. SCHMALZRIEDT, *Peri Physeos. Zur Frühgeschichte der Buchtitel*, München, 1970, p. 20-23; M.-K. LEE, *Epistemology after Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*, Oxford, 2005, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> PLATO, *Theaetetus*, 152c; SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Against the Mathematicians* VII, 60; DIOGENES LAERTIUS, III, 37 & 57.

“Diagoras was Athenian, but you took vengeance on him when he burlesqued the Athenian Mysteries and, although you read his Phrygian tales, you hate us.”<sup>10</sup>

The title *Φρυγιοὶ λόγοι*, which Tatian attributes to Diagoras, is problematic.<sup>11</sup> One possibility is that it is borrowed from Democritus. A similar title, in the singular, is ascribed to Democritus: *Φρύγιος λόγος*. The title appears in an appendix to the catalogue of Democritus’ works by Diogenes Laertius. The content and nature of this treatise remain nonetheless unknown. Although a similar work, *Χαλδαϊκὸς λόγος*, is listed, the other works in the appendix are of a different nature:

“Some include as separate items the following works taken from his notes: ‘On the sacred writings [or hieroglyphics] in Babylon’, ‘On those in Meroë’, ‘Periplus of the Ocean’, ‘On History’, ‘Chaldean *logos*’, ‘Phrygian *logos*’, ‘On fever and those whose illness makes them cough’, ‘Legal causes’, ‘Chernika (?), or Problems’.”<sup>12</sup>

These works are usually considered to be spurious and were already disregarded as inauthentic by the grammarian Thrasyllus (1<sup>st</sup> century AD),<sup>13</sup> despite the fact that Democritus undertook many voyages to Egypt, Persia and Chaldea.<sup>14</sup> From these voyages Democritus could have absorbed the necessary information for writings on Phrygian antiquity and language. Such an assumption is nonetheless improbable due to the overall low interest in Phrygian culture, which was deemed barbaric in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>15</sup> It seems more plausible to interpret the adjective *Φρύγιος* not as a specific reference to Phrygian culture. The term *Φρύγιος λόγος* probably fulfilled a more proverbial use, pointing out the examination of the ancient origins of e.g. Egyptian gods, such as Serapis.<sup>16</sup> But Phrygian *logos*, as a euhemerizing literary

<sup>10</sup> TATIAN, *Address to the Greeks*, 27 (transl. J.B. Rives): Διαγόρας Ἀθηναῖος ἦν, ἀλλὰ τοῦτον ἐξορχησάμενον τὰ παρ’ Ἀθηναίους μυστήρια τετιμωρήκατε καὶ τοῖς Φρυγίοις αὐτοῦ λόγοις ἐντυγχάνοντες ἡμᾶς μεμισήκατε.

<sup>11</sup> A recent study by L.R. LANZILOTTA, “Christian Apologists and Greek Gods,” in J.N. BREMMER & A. ERSKINE (eds.), *The Gods of Ancient Greece. Identities and Transformations*, Edinburgh, 2010, p. 454-457 indicates that Tatian heavily relied upon information from Justin Martyr, *First Apology* and elaborated this to a more aggressive tone. According to Lanzilotta, *Address to the Greeks* does not display a high degree of philosophical depth, as Tatian (e.g. *Address to the Greeks*, 2-3) appears to have had only superficial knowledge of Greek philosophical theories on divine existence.

<sup>12</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS, IX, 49 (transl. R.D. Hicks): Τάττουσι δέ τινες κατ’ ἴδιαν ἐν τῶν Ὑπομνημάτων καὶ ταῦτα: Περί τῶν ἐν Βαβυλῶνι ἱερῶν γραμμάτων. Περί τῶν ἐν Μερῶν. Ὠκεανοῦ περίπλους. Περί ἱστορίας. Χαλδαϊκὸς λόγος. Φρύγιος λόγος. Περί πυρετοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ νόσου βησσόντων. Νομικὰ αἴτια. Χειρόκιμητα [ῆ] προβλήματα.

<sup>13</sup> M. WINIARCZYK, “Diagoras von Melos: Wahrheit und Legende (Fortsetzung),” *Eos* 68 (1980), p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS, IX, 35.

<sup>15</sup> J.B. RIVES, “Phrygian Tales,” *GRBS* 45 (2005), p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> JANKO, *l.c.* (n. 6), p. 7, n. 23 (based on CICERO, *On the Nature of the Gods* III, 42; PLUTARCH, *On Isis and Osiris*, 29; PLUTARCH, *On the Decline of the Oracles*, 10 and

genre, did not appear earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>17</sup> So chronology excludes Democritus as the author of a Phrygian *logos*.

Nevertheless, a Phrygian *logos* was attributed in Antiquity to Democritus and we now should ask how this title could have been transferred to Diagoras. A possible explanation could be the perceived link between the atheism of Diagoras and the materialism of Democritus. Such a link can already be found in the character of “Socrates the Melian”, an equation between Socrates the Athenian and Diagoras of Melos,<sup>18</sup> in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, 830 from 423 BC. Socrates the Melian rejects belief in Zeus in favour of *Dinos*, a cosmic swirl, which could be viewed as a reference to the atomism of Democritus and his belief in the origin of the universe.<sup>19</sup> In Byzantine texts such a linking can also be attested.<sup>20</sup> Diagoras is regarded as the disciple of Democritus, but this discipleship should be rejected for chronological reasons<sup>21</sup> and must probably be viewed in a tradition of invented discipleship that already surfaces in the *Scholia Vetera in Nubes*, 830b, which mention Diagoras as the teacher of Socrates, while the *Scholia Recentiora in Nubes*, 830 (Thomas-Triclinius) identify Diagoras as a pupil of Socrates.<sup>22</sup>

If the transfer of a title attributed to Democritus to Diagoras is one possibility, another possibility is that the title reflects the use of Φρύγιος λόγος to indicate a euhemerizing account of myth, as attested from the Hellenistic period onwards. Tatian might have associated one of many (anonymous) euhemerizing *Phrygian logoi* with the divulging of the Eleusinian Mysteries and, for this reason, assigned the authorship

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PLUTARCH, *De Daedalis Plataeensis*, fr. 157, preserved by EUSEBIUS, *Preparation for the Gospel* III, 1.1).

<sup>17</sup> WINIARCZYK, *l.c.* (n. 13), p. 60; RIVES, *l.c.* (n. 15), p. 231-232.

<sup>18</sup> JANKO, *l.c.* (n. 6), p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> In Democritean cosmology (DK 68 A 67, 68 & 69), a world order forms when random atoms begin to form a circular swirl. See also C.C.W. TAYLOR, “The Atomists,” in A.A. LONG (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 186, 203, n. 13.

<sup>20</sup> A connection between Diagoras and Democritus can be found in the legend that Democritus bought Diagoras as a slave and made him his pupil. However, this legend does not appear until the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD in a Byzantine source by PSEUDO-HESYCHIUS MILESIUS, *On Famous Men*, 17. The 10<sup>th</sup> century Suda is a literal copy of this account. (*Suda*, s.v. Διαγόρας (transl. D. Whitehead): Τηλεκλείδου ἢ Τηλεκλύτου, Μήλιος, φιλόσοφος καὶ ᾠσμάτων ποιητής· ὃν εὐφυᾶ θεασάμενος Δημοκρίτος ὁ Ἀβδηρίτης ὠνήσατο αὐτὸν δοῦλον ὄντα μυρίων δραχμῶν καὶ μαθητὴν ἐποίησατο (“Diagoras, Son of Telekleides or Teleklytos; a Melian, a philosopher and a lyric poet; whom Democritus from Abdera, seeing that he was naturally talented, bought – since he was a slave – for ten thousand drachmas and made a pupil.”). Probably Byzantine scholars tended to link the atheism of Diagoras with the materialism of Democritus. See also J. BARNES, *The Presocratic Philosophers* II, London, 1979, p. 154-159 on this matter. The claim that Diagoras was a slave in these Byzantine sources could also be an alternative interpretation of THUCYDIDES, V, 116 on the abduction of the Melians into slavery after the fall of Melos in 416 BC.

<sup>21</sup> F. JACOBY, *Diagoras ὁ Ἄθεος*, Berlin, 1959, p. 13, 45, n. 220.

<sup>22</sup> D. HOLWERDA, *Scholia Vetera in Aristophanis Nubes*, Groningen, 1977, p. 167 & W.J.W. KOSTER, *Scholia Recentiora in Aristophanis Nubes*, Groningen, 1974, p. 120-121.

to Diagoras, the most notorious atheist and transgressor of the ritual.<sup>23</sup> In that case, the title is attributed to Diagoras by Tatian because of a general link perceived between euhemerizing authors and atheists. For example, Leon of Pella (4<sup>th</sup> century BC), the author of a euhemerizing account on the Egyptian gods, was a source of inspiration for Diodorus Siculus (*floruit* c. 60 BC) and for Tatian.<sup>24</sup>

From Tatian on, a tradition started that linked Leon not only with other euhemeristic writers and atheists<sup>25</sup>, but even with radical atheists like Diagoras and Theodorus, as can be read in *Protrepticus* by Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – 215 AD), a contemporary of Tatian:

“Wherefore (for I must by no means conceal it) I cannot help wondering how Euhemerus of Agrigentum, and Nicanor of Cyprus, and Diagoras, and Hippo of Melos, and besides these, that Cyrenian of the name of Theodorus, and numbers of others, who lived a sober life, and had a clearer insight than the rest of the world into the prevailing error respecting those gods, were called Atheists; for if they did not arrive at the knowledge of the truth, they certainly suspected the error of the common opinion.”<sup>26</sup>

The connection between Euhemerus and the radical atheist Diagoras, as mentioned by Clement, is evident: both exposed the false nature of the pagan gods. Consequently, it would not have been surprising for Christian writers to associate Diagoras with any euhemerizing Phrygian *logos*. A similar observation can be found in Arnobius (*floruit* c. 270 AD):

“And here, indeed, we can show that all those whom you represent to us as and call gods, were but men, by quoting either Euhemerus of Acragas, whose books were translated by Ennius into Latin that all might be thoroughly acquainted with them; or Nicagoras the Cyprian; or the Pellaeon Leon; or Theodorus of Cyrene; or Hippo and Diagoras of Melos; or a thousand other

<sup>23</sup> RIVES, *l.c.* (n. 15), p. 231-232. The defamation of Mysteries is a recurring topic for Christian apologists. See, for instance, JUSTIN MARTYR, *First Apology*, 25, 27, 29 & 54; TATIAN, *Address to the Greeks*, 8; ATHENAGORAS, *A Plea for the Christians*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> M. WINIARCZYK, *Euhemerios von Messene: Leben, Werk und Nachwirkung*, München, 2002, p. 150-153.

<sup>25</sup> WINIARCZYK, *l.c.* (n. 13), p. 64-65.

<sup>26</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Protrepticus* II, 24.2 (transl. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson): ὧν δὴ χάριν ὁὐ γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐπεισὶ μοι ὅτι τρόπῳ Εὐήμερον τὸν Ἀκραγαντῖνον καὶ Νικάνορα τὸν Κύπριον καὶ Διαγόραν καὶ Ἴπωνα τὸν Μηλίω τὸν τε Κυρηναῖον ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐκεῖνον ὁ Θεόδωρος ὄνομα αὐτῶ καὶ τινὰς ἄλλους συχνοῦς, σωφρόνως βεβιωκότας καὶ καθεωρακότας ὀξύτερον πού τῶν λοιπῶν ἀνθρώπων τὴν ἀμφὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τούτους πλάνην, ἀθέους ἐπικεκλήρισαν, εἰ καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν αὐτὴν μὴ νενοηκότας, ἀλλὰ τὴν πλάνην γε ὀπωπτευκότας.

writers, who have minutely, industriously, and carefully brought secret things to light with noble candour.”<sup>27</sup>

Notwithstanding the sense for rhetorical exaggeration (*vel auctoribus aliis mille*), Arnobius sees no difference between famous atheist intellectuals and their views on the origins of Graeco-Roman gods. They all shared euhemeristic opinions in their refutation of pagan religion.

To sum up this first part, *Φρυγίοι λόγοι* is not a title that could be authentic for a treatise by Diagoras of Melos. It may have been inspired by a similar title attributed to Democritus, whose materialism was perceived as atheist by later generations, or, even more probably, it might have been the result of a Christian tradition that combined euhemeristic writers and atheist philosophers of different periods with the sole aim of refuting pagan deities and averting accusations of atheism made against Christians by pagans.<sup>28</sup>

## 1.2 *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι*

Another title that is attested in (late) Antiquity for Diagoras’ atheist book is *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι*. This title clearly bears resemblance to other titles of prose works by sophists such as *Καταβάλλοντες λόγοι* (“Knock-down Arguments”) by Protagoras and *Ὑπερβάλλοντες λόγοι* (“Winning Arguments”) by Thrasymachus.<sup>29</sup> However, *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι* as a specific title does not appear before the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the earliest source being Pseudo-Hesychius of Miletus.

“Democritus of Abdera had bought Diagoras, a son of Telekleides and seeing that he was bright being a slave, for 10.000 drachmes and he made him his pupil. He applied himself to the lyric art. He was called an atheist, because of the following: after the time when someone of the same art, being accused by him of stealing a paean which he himself had made, swore he did not steal this, but performing it a short while later, met with success. Thereupon Diagoras, being upset, wrote the so-called *Apopyrgizontes Logoi*, which includes his withdrawal and falling away from his belief concerning the divine.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> ARNOBIUS, *Against the Heathen* IV, 29 (transl. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson): *Et possumus quidem hoc in loco omnes istos nobis quos inducitis atque appellatis deos, homines fuisse monstrare, vel Agragantino Euhemero replicato, cuius libellos Ennius, clarum ut fieret cunctis, sermonem in Italum transtulit; vel Nicagora Cyprio, vel Pellaeo Leonte, vel Cyrenensi Theodoro, vel Hippone ac Diagora Meliis, vel auctoribus aliis mille, qui scrupulosae diligentiae cura in lucem res abditas libertate ingenua protulerunt.*

<sup>28</sup> LANZILOTTA, *l.c.* (n. 11), p. 454-455 & J.N. BREMMER, “Atheism in Antiquity,” in M. MARTIN (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> JANKO, *l.c.* (n. 6), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> PSEUDO-HESYCHIUS MILESIUS, *On Famous Men*, 17: Διαγόραν τὸν Τηλεκλείδου εὐφυᾶ θεασάμενος Δημόκριτος ὁ Ἀβδηρῆτης ὠνήσατο αὐτὸν δοῦλον ὄντα μυρίων δραχμῶν καὶ μαθητὴν ἐποίησατο. ὁ δὲ τῆς λυρικῆς ἐπέθετο. ἐπεκλήθη δὲ ἄθεος, ὅτι ὁμότεχνός τις αἰτιαθεὶς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, ὡς δὴ παιᾶνα ὑφελόμενος, ὄν αὐτὸς ἐποίησεν, ἐξωμόσατο μὴ κεκλωφέναι αὐτόν,

The Suda quotes this fragment almost in its entirety, but adds one sentence that mentions Corinth as the place of death of Diagoras.<sup>31</sup> Another lemma from the Suda offers the following information:

“The works which Diagoras the Atheist wrote, containing the recantation and dissolution of his belief in the divine.”<sup>32</sup>

The exact meaning of *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι* is unclear. Some scholars think there is an etymological connection between the verb *ἀποπυργίζω*, which is without doubt a unique word in the ancient Greek language or a *hapax legomenon*,<sup>33</sup> and the noun *πύργος*.<sup>34</sup> The original meaning of the latter is “tower (in a set of walls)”, but since Homer it can also be interpreted in a more military context as “bastion” or “citadel”.<sup>35</sup> Related verbs such as *πυργοῦν* and *πυργοῦσθαι* can be translated as “to fence with towers” or more generally as “to build up”.<sup>36</sup> The verb *ἀποπυργίζω* also seems related to *ἀποτειχίζω* (“to block off by a set of walls”), a verb that is used by Herodotus, but also by Thucydides and Aristophanes – that is, in the period when Diagoras himself lived.<sup>37</sup>

Drachmann, for instance, translated *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι* as “Destructive Considerations”,<sup>38</sup> while Jacoby suggested the translation “Fortifying Arguments, in the sense of defending mankind by (a wall with) towers” or (based on Aristophanes’ *ἀποτειχίζω*) “inclosing the gods, hemming them in, blockading them by (a wall with) towers”.<sup>39</sup> Jacoby’s translation is mainly based on a fragment (286) of Euripides’ *Bellerophon*, which mentions *τὰ θεῖα πυργοῦσ’ αἱ κακαὶ τε συμφοραὶ* (“they fortify

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μικρὸν δὲ ὕστερον ἐπιδειξάμενος αὐτὸν εὐημέρησεν. ἐντεῦθεν ὁ Διαγόρας λυπηθεὶς ἔγραψε τοὺς Ἀποπυργίζοντας λόγους, ἔκπτωσιν ἔχοντας τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον δόξης.

<sup>31</sup> Suda, s.v. Διαγόρας (transl. D. Whitehead): κατοικήσας δὲ Κόρινθον ὁ Διαγόρας αὐτόθι τὸν βίον κατέστρεψεν. (“But Diagoras, settling in Corinth, lived out his life there.”)

<sup>32</sup> Suda, s.v. Ἀποπυργίζοντας λόγους (transl. D. Whitehead): Ἀποπυργίζοντας λόγους, οἷς ἔγραψε Διαγόρας ὁ ἄθεος, ἀναχώρησιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔκπτωσιν ἔχοντας τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον δόξης.

<sup>33</sup> JACOBY, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 47, n. 236: *ἀποπυργίζω* is unique in Greek literature and its simplex *πυργίζω* is not found anywhere.

<sup>34</sup> Only J.H. HORDERN, “Philodemus and the Poems of Diagoras,” *ZPE* 136 (2001), p. 34, n. 6 suggests “for what it is worth” a deviant etymological explanation and translates *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι* as “Inflammatory Discourses”, referring to the 1<sup>st</sup> plural Dorian aorist (*ἀποπυρρίζομεν*) of *ἀποπυρρίζω* in EPICARMUS (F122 Kassel & Austin), which can be translated as “to roast on charcoal”. Clearly, this theory is flawed, because *ἀποπυργίζω* and *ἀποπυρρίζω* have no etymological connection whatsoever.

<sup>35</sup> For *πύργος* in the sense of “tower (in a set of walls)”, see HOMER, *The Iliad* VII, 337. For *πύργος* in the sense of “citadel” or “bastion”, see HOMER, *The Odyssey* XI, 556.

<sup>36</sup> HOMER, *The Odyssey* XI, 264-266.

<sup>37</sup> HERODOTUS, VI, 32.2; THUCYDIDES, I, 64.1; ARISTOPHANES, *Birds*, 1576. See also L. WOODBURY, “The Date and Atheism of Diagoras of Melos,” *Phoenix* 19 (1965), p. 204.

<sup>38</sup> A.B. DRACHMANN, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity*, London, 1922, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> JACOBY, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 30.



religion, and ill-fortune”).<sup>40</sup> According to Jacoby, this fragment could indicate that the atheist book of Diagoras was well-known in Athens during the early years of the Peloponnesian War, because *Bellerophon* was produced before 426 BC.<sup>41</sup> But this argument has a strongly hypothetical character and the contextual meaning of line 286 remains unclear, due to the fragmentary nature of *Bellerophon*.

Moreover, Jacoby did admit that 5<sup>th</sup> century BC writers would not have used verbs such as ἀποπυργίζω, ἀποτειχίζω or any related verb in a non-military, allegorical sense (e.g. “destroying the towers of the gods” or “throwing the gods from their towers”).<sup>42</sup> Jacoby therefore believed that the original title of the atheist book was not changed into the spurious title Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι until a later period.<sup>43</sup> Derenne nevertheless proposed that the title should be interpreted as “Destroying the Towers of the Gods”,<sup>44</sup> a translation Woodbury adapted to a less metaphorical level by suggesting the title “Wreckers” or “Debunkers”.<sup>45</sup> Romer later translated Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι as “Words (or Arguments) That Wall Off”<sup>46</sup>, which Janko adopted as “Walling-off Arguments”.<sup>47</sup> Most recently, Whitmarsh holds on to the supposed etymological link between ἀποπυργίζω and πύργος by translating the title as “Arguments That Knock Down Towers”.<sup>48</sup>

However, searching analogies between Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι and certain nouns and verbs in the period of Diagoras remains unsatisfactory, especially when we consider the fact that the title Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι only surfaces in Byzantine sources. It seems more suitable to search for analogies within a Byzantine setting.

<sup>40</sup> On this matter, see also WOODBURY, *l.c.* (n. 36), p. 205; WINIARCZYK, *l.c.* (n. 12), p. 54, n. 91; T. WHITMARSH, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*, New York NY, 2015, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> JACOBY, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 44, n. 200.

<sup>42</sup> JACOBY, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 29; WOODBURY, *l.c.* (n. 37), p. 205.

<sup>43</sup> JACOBY, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 30 (wrongly) believed that the original title of the atheist book was Φουγίοι λόγοι.

<sup>44</sup> E. DERENNE, *Les procès d'impiété, intentés aux Philosophes à Athènes au V<sup>e</sup> et au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C.*, Liège, 1930, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> WOODBURY, *l.c.* (n. 37), p. 205.

<sup>46</sup> F.E. ROMER, “Atheism, Impiety and the Limos Melios in Aristophanes’ Birds,” *AJPh* 115 (1994), p. 357.

<sup>47</sup> JANKO, *l.c.* (n. 6), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> WHITMARSH, *o.c.* (n. 40), p. 113. Whitmarsh believes that the *Bellerophon*-fragment (“besieging the towers of Olympus”) refers to the Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι of Diagoras, which means that the atheist book would have been already written in the 420s BC. Such suggestion was also made by JACOBY, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 44, n. 200, but mainly to support his argument that Diagoras was convicted as early as 433/2 BC. This opinion has been convincingly debunked by WOODBURY, *l.c.* (n. 37), p. 192-197, based on chronological information by DIODORUS SICULUS, XIII, 6-7 and the 11<sup>th</sup> century Arab biographer AL-MUBAŠŠIR (Diagoras T10 Winiarczyk) that the book was published posthumously, but also the fact that Diagoras was of no political importance in 433/2 BC. Nor was he an associate of Pericles, like Anaxagoras and Protagoras, which would have made him a target of the Diopeithes-decree.

Considering this, a hypothesis that was suggested for the first time during Winiarczyk's doctoral exam seems noteworthy.<sup>49</sup> The noun ἀποπυργίζω could be related to πυργίσκος, a noun meaning “closet” or “cupboard” that does not appear before the Christian era.<sup>50</sup> As a diminutive, it would have been derived from the obscure noun πυργίς that surfaces in the writings of the Alexandrian poet Herondas (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC).

If ἀποπυργίζω can be etymologically traced back to πυργίσκος, then Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι could mean “Disclosing Words (or Opinions)”.<sup>51</sup> A specific lemma from the Suda supports this argument:

“Cabinets and treasure-chests: household furniture. Also [attested is the verb] ἀποπυργίζω. Diagoras wrote the Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι, containing his withdrawal and falling-away of the belief concerning the divine; for he had previously been an atheist.”<sup>52</sup>

In any case, πυργίσκος, as a diminutive of πυργίς can be traced back etymologically to πύργος. The original meaning of πυργίς is most likely “hiding-place”,<sup>53</sup> and that of the diminutive consequently “little hiding-place”, but in a Byzantine context πυργίσκος clearly means “closet”. Besides, the juxtaposition of Θησαυροφυλάκεια in Suda (s.v. Πυργίσκοι) suggests “a closet obtaining valuable objects”.

Winiarczyk, however, dismissed the theory as “fragile” and preferred the hypothesis that ἀποπυργίζω could still be a direct derivation from the original (military) meaning of πύργος, without any relationship to (the Alexandrian) πυργίς or (the Byzantine) πυργίσκος.<sup>54</sup>

I suggest that we abandon the idea that *Apopyrgizontes Logoi* is an authentic title and accept that it is most likely a later creation. Indeed, it is only cited in three lemmata from the Suda which were clearly derived from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD Byzantine writer Pseudo-Hesychius of Miletus. The title Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι is therefore probably a late antique from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD at the earliest and does not qualify as an authentic title for the atheist book of Diagoras. Most likely, late ancient scholars created the title Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι in an attempt to connect the atheist book of Diagoras with supposed atheist writings, such as Καταβάλλοντες λόγοι (“Knock-down Arguments”) by Protagoras (c. 490 – c. 420 BC) and Ὑπερβάλλοντες λόγοι (“Winning Arguments”) by Thrasymachus (c. 459 – c. 400 BC).<sup>55</sup>

Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι could therefore be considered to be a Byzantine invention from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, which can be translated most fittingly by

<sup>49</sup> WINIARCZYK, *l.c.* (n. 13), p. 57.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: the German translation by Winiarczyk being “Aufdeckende, enthüllende Worte”.

<sup>52</sup> Suda s.v. Πυργίσκοι (transl. D. Whitehead): Πυργίσκοι καὶ Θησαυροφυλάκεια: σκεῆθι κατ' οἶκον. καὶ Ἀποπυργίζω. Διαγόρας ἔγραψε τοὺς Ἀποπυργίζοντας λόγους, ἀναχώρησιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔκπτωσιν ἔχοντας τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον δόξης: ἄθεος γὰρ ἦν τὸ πρότερον.

<sup>53</sup> WINIARCZYK, *l.c.* (n. 13), p. 57-58.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> WOODBURY, *l.c.* (n. 37), p. 203.

“Disclosing Opinions”. Why did late antique scholars choose such a title? It could refer to the revealing of the secrecy of the Mysteries of Eleusis by Diagoras.<sup>56</sup> The Eleusinian Mysteries were revered for the exceptional bond they assured between worshippers and deities, based on a series of secret rites and initiation rituals.<sup>57</sup> Punishment for revealing the secrecy was extremely harsh, including the death penalty.<sup>58</sup> This can explain the death sentence Diagoras eventually received from the Athenian Assembly in 415 BC.<sup>59</sup> This fact was well-known to the later tradition on Diagoras.<sup>60</sup>

But descriptions of the content of the atheist book by Pseudo-Hesychius of Miletus and the Suda do not mention any mocking of the Mysteries. Instead, the *Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι* are considered to contain a “withdrawal of belief in the divine” and the “recantation and dissolution of his belief in the divine”. Indeed, the Byzantine sources do not apply the phrase *ἀναιρεῖν θεοῦς/θεῖον* (“destroying the gods/divinity”) that is commonly used by Philodemus or Diogenes of Oenoanda to refer to the extreme nature of the atheism of Diagoras. Instead, nouns like *ἀναχώρησις* (“withdrawal”) and *ἐκπτώσις* (“extrusion”) are being used. These can be understood as references to the conversion that Diagoras was believed to have experienced in the later tradition. Byzantine sources assumed that Diagoras had first been a pious poet before losing his belief in the gods, an idea that goes back to

<sup>56</sup> WINIARCZYK, *l.c.* (n. 13), p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> On the Eleusinian Mysteries, the most recent research has been done by J.N. BREMMER, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, Leiden, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 478-482 (transl. H.P. Foley) refers to the importance of upholding the secrecy:

τά τ' οὐπως ἔστι παρεξίμεν οὔτε πυθέσθαι  
οὔτ' ἀχέειν: μέγα γάρ τι θεῶν σέβας ἰσχάνει ἀδὴν.  
ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων:  
ὃς δ' ἀτελής ἱερῶν ὃς τ' ἄμμορος, οὔποθ' ὁμοίων  
αἴσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἡερόεντι.

“(Demeter) revealed the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries to all of them, holy rites that are not to be transgressed, nor pried into, nor divulged. For a great awe of the gods stops the voice. Blessed is the mortal on earth, who has seen these rites, But the uninitiated who has no share in them never has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.”

On the case of Aeschylus, risking the death penalty for alluding on the secrecy, see R.A. BAUMAN, *Political Trials in Ancient Greece*, London, 1990, p. 45-47 (based on AELIANUS, *Various Histories* V, 19).

<sup>59</sup> J.D. MIKALSON, *Ancient Greek Religion*, Malden MA, 2005, p. 84-86 (based on DIODORUS SICULUS, XIII, 6-7).

<sup>60</sup> JOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *Against Apion* II, 37; ATHENAEUS, XIII, 611a-b; LIBANIUS, *Apology of Socrates*, 154; JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 4; CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Against Julian* VI, 189.

Hellenistic and Roman sources.<sup>61</sup> This explains why they speak about his “withdrawal of belief in the divine”.

By the sixth century, the work of Diagoras was probably already lost and Byzantine scholars could only speculate about its content and form a view based on what they knew about Diagoras and other supposed *atheoi*. Byzantine scholarship was familiar with the doctrines of Thrasymachus,<sup>62</sup> whose treatise Ὑπερβάλλοντες λόγοι (“Winning Arguments”)<sup>63</sup> could have influenced, in return, the construction of Ἀποπυρρίζοντες λόγοι as a title of the book by Diagoras.

Apparently, Byzantine scholars were convinced that the primary idea behind the writing of the book by Diagoras was the refutation of any belief in divine justice,<sup>64</sup> in response to the lack of divine intervention after the injustice Diagoras had experienced himself, as attested in Hellenistic and Roman literary traditions.

## 2. Conclusion

Regarding the two titles of Diagoras’ work, it is safe to conclude that none has any historical value: Φρουγίοι λόγοι must probably be placed in a literary genre of euhemerizing accounts that historically does not fit the timeframe Diagoras lived in and Ἀποπυρρίζοντες λόγοι appears to be a Byzantine invention, since ἀποπυρρίζω is most likely a Byzantine *hapax legomenon*.

We know nonetheless that a book existed from testimonies by Epicurus and Aristoxenus, which were both preserved by Philodemus.<sup>65</sup> Either the book was untitled (χωρὶς ἐπιγραφῆς) or it possessed a more generic (*Ersatz*) title like Περὶ Θεῶν, in accordance with the philosophical genre and the literary tradition of early prose.<sup>66</sup> This last idea is plausible, bearing in mind that every discourse on the existence of the gods from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD was named

<sup>61</sup> *Scholia* on ARISTOPHANES, *Clouds*, 830b (Diagoras T6A Winiarczyk); SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Against the Mathematicians* IX, 50-53.

<sup>62</sup> HERMIAS, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus*, 239.21 Couvreur (transl. A.B. Drachmann): ὅτι οἱ θεοὶ οὐχ ὀρώσι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα· οὐ γὰρ ἂν τὸ μέγιστον τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀγαθῶν παρεῖδον τὴν δικαιοσύνην· ὀρώμεν γὰρ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ταύτηι μὴ χρωμένους. (“The gods do not see the things that are done among men; if they did, they would not overlook the greatest human good, justice. For we find that men do not follow it.”). The disbelief of Thrasymachus in divine justice also resonates in the character of “Unjust Speech” in ARISTOPHANES, *Clouds*, 900 that proclaims that (divine) justice is a fabrication and subordinate to the advantages of injustice. See also BARNES, *o.c.* (n. 20), p. 152; D. SILVERMINTZ, “Thrasymachus,” in P. O’GRADY (ed.), *The Sophists: An Introduction*, London, 2008, p. 98 on this matter.

<sup>63</sup> PLUTARCH, *Table-talk* I, 2.3.

<sup>64</sup> PSEUDO-HESYCHIUS MILESIUS, *On Famous Men*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> PHILODEMUS, *On Piety*, P. Herc. 1077, col. 82.5-18 (on authority of Epicurus); PHILODEMUS, *On Piety*, P. Herc. 1428, col. 11-12 (on authority of Aristoxenus). See also HORDERN, *l.c.* (n. 34), p. 33.

<sup>66</sup> See SCHMALZRIEDT, *o.c.* (n. 8), p. 20-23, 83-119 for a similar analysis of the title Περὶ φύσεως.

Περὶ θεῶν.<sup>67</sup> This could explain why neither Aristoxenus nor Epicurus mentioned a title for the atheist book, because it would have been too evident or too unimportant to be mentioned. An unusual title like Φρογίοι λόγοι or Ἀποπυργίζοντες λόγοι would have certainly caught their attention. This did not happen, for the simple reason that both titles did not emerge until a much later period in history.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For a complete list of discourses with the title Περὶ θεῶν, see W. FAHR, ΘΕΟΥΣ ΝΟΜΙΖΕΙΝ: *Zum Problem der Anfänge des Atheismus bei den Griechen*, Hildesheim, 1969, p. 183.

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