

# Why understanding Heraclitus requires being a Delian diver? (Diogenes Laertius 2. 22 and 9. 12)<sup>1</sup>

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During the Classical Antiquity many authors made observations regarding the darkness that, like a halo, surrounded Heraclitus' thought.<sup>2</sup> Diogenes Laertius mentioned this twice in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. In both occasions he stated that a Delian diver was required to achieve the comprehension of the depths of philosophy. Diogenes Laertius used this expressive phrase to convey the sensation, felt by the perplexed readers of Heraclitus' book, of entering an abyss, to the point of requiring the skillfulness of a very specific diver from the island of Delos to descend into its unfathomable depths. For this reason, the expression 'Delian diver', has been used to graphically describe the sensation felt by those who strive to decipher the Heraclitean fragments, and to underline the philosopher from Ephesus' recurring and proverbial image of obscurity and mystery he developed since the Classical Antiquity.

For this reason, given the relevance of the expression, it is surprising that scholars have not felt the need to 'go deeper' into the analysis of the meaning of the expression 'Delian diver', settling for the 'superficial' conjecture that the divers from that Greek island were especially renowned and expert fishermen, possibly of sponges or pearls. In fact, it is easy to see that this explanation is fruit of a simple and tautological argument: if it was stated that a diver was required to understand Heraclitus it is because these divers must have been known for their particular diving ability.<sup>3</sup> However, no testimony leads to this conclusion. The present study aims, hence, to offer a detailed analysis of the sense of this expression, under the belief that, rather, it hides an allusion to some particularly relevant aspect of Heraclitus' thought that seems to have gone unnoticed until now.

## Diogenes Laertius' two references to the Delian diver

That is the reason why it is necessary to carefully read and analyze both passages in which Diogenes Laertius mentions the Delian diver. The first one, included in the paragraphs dedicated to commenting the figure of Socrates, reads as follows:

φασὶ δ' Εὐριπίδην αὐτῷ δόντα τὸ Ἡρακλείτου σύγγραμμα ἐρέσθαι, "τί δοκεῖ;" τὸν δὲ φάναι, "ἅ μὲν συνῆκα, γενναῖα· οἶμαι δὲ καὶ ἅ μὴ συνῆκα· πλὴν Δηλίου γέ τινος δεῖται κολυμβητοῦ."

And they say that Euripides gave him a small work of Heraclitus to read, and asked him afterwards what he thought of it, and he replied: 'The part I understand is excellent, and so too is, I dare say, the part I do not understand; but it needs a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Toutes nos sources sont d'accord pour affirmer que le livre d'Héraclite n'était pas facile à comprendre', Mouraviev in Goulet 2000, 601.

<sup>3</sup> A clear instance is Burkert's statement 'the skill of a certain 'delian Diver' was proverbial'. This researcher reached this conclusion from its mention in the two Laertian passages. Burkert 1972, 138 n. 104.

<sup>4</sup> D.L. 2. 22.

The second time, this expression appears in the paragraphs dedicated to commenting the life of Heraclitus. It is a variation of the first version:

Τὰ δὲ περὶ Σωκράτους καὶ ὅσα ἐντυχῶν τῷ συγγράμματι εἶποι, κομίσαντος Εὐριπίδου καθὰ φησιν Ἀρίστων, ἐν τῷ περὶ Σωκράτους εἰρήκαμεν. Σέλευκος μέντοι φησὶν ὁ γραμματικὸς Κρότωνά τινα ἰστορεῖν ἐν τῷ Κατακολυμβητῇ Κράτητά τινα πρῶτον εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα κομίσαι τὸ βιβλίον· ὃν καὶ εἰπεῖν Δηλίου τινὸς δεῖσθαι κολυμβητοῦ, ὃς οὐκ ἀποπνιγῆσεται ἐν αὐτῷ.

The story told by Ariston of Socrates, and his remarks when he came upon the book of Heraclitus, which Euripides brought him, I have mentioned in my *Life of Socrates*. However, Seleucus the grammarian says that a certain Croton relates in his book called *The Diver* that he said work of Heraclitus was first brought into Greece by one Crates, who further said it required a Delian diver not to be drowned on it.<sup>5</sup>

Both passages state that Euripides gave Heraclitus' book to Socrates, which led to his ironic answer when Euripides asked for his opinion. However, the second version adds that, according to Seleucus, Croton wrote in his book entitled *The Diver* that it was Crates who first brought Heraclitus' book to Greece. Furthermore, he would have stated, just as Socrates did, that a Delian diver was required to avoid drowning in it. The comparison of both Laertian passages leads to the conclusion that there is a greater unity and coherence between them than it may initially seem. Thus, the second passage tells us that it was Ariston, probably in his *Life of Socrates*<sup>6</sup>, who offered Diogenes Laertius the information read in the first one. Note Diogenes Laertius' interest in relating both passages, when recalling that "the story told by Ariston of Socrates, and his remarks when he came upon the book of Heraclitus, which Euripides brought him, I have mentioned in my *Life of Socrates*". A direct nexus was thus established between the first and second passages with the objective, in Diogenes Laertius' most common style, of complementing and broadening the scope of information by turning to additional sources.

Hence, in continuity with the aforementioned, it turns out that an unknown Crates also had a similar opinion to that of Socrates: that a Delian diver was required to avoid drowning in Heraclitus' book. There are two reasons why this new information does not imply, nonetheless, a contradiction between both passages. First, the fact that Crates was the first to take the book to Greece is not incompatible with the circumstance that, once introduced, it reached the hands of Euripides and that he, in turn, lent it to Socrates.<sup>7</sup> However, as we will later see, this attempt to conciliate both versions conflicts with Tatian's assertion that it was actually Euripides who took Heraclitus' book from Ephesus to Athens. Second, and although this question has sparked controversies among researchers, it could be assumed that the unknown Crates had the

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<sup>5</sup> D.L. 9 12.

<sup>6</sup> 'En IX 12 l'histoire es dite empruntée à Ariston de Céos, sans douter dans sa *Vie de Socrate*', Goulet, 1994, 486.

<sup>7</sup> 'Comme la notule entend corriger ou préciser l'anecdote mettant en cause la découverte d'Héraclite à Athènes à l'époque d'Euripide et de Socrate, il faut comprendre que selon les sources antiques ce Cratès vivait à la même époque ou même avant', Goulet 1994, 486.

same opinion as Socrates concerning the need for a Delian diver to understand Heraclitus' book.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, the discussion regarding whether it was Socrates or Crates, or both,<sup>9</sup> who formulated the ingenious sentence, is secondary for the present study's purposes.

### **The relation between Socrates and Euripides was object of the comical authors' satire**

Anyhow, it is noteworthy that Diogenes Laertius informed that Socrates learned of Heraclitus' book through Euripides. This corroborates the close relation that must have existed between them, just as Diogenes Laertius himself announced at the beginning of his presentation of Socrates' life when arguing that 'some people believed that he (sc. Socrates) assisted Euripides'.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in order to demonstrate that his statement on Socrates' surprising assistance to Euripides was not a simple presumption, but a well known fact, Diogenes Laertius provided the testimony of four different passages from three comical authors in II 18.<sup>11</sup> Given the importance of these testimonies for the development of this study, we must refer to them here. In the first place, Diogenes Laertius cites the following text by Mnesilochus:<sup>12</sup>

Φρύγες ἐστὶ καινὸν δρᾶμα τοῦτ' Εὐριπίδου, ... ᾧ καὶ Σωκράτης.....τὰ φρύγαν' ὑποτίθησι

'This new play of Euripides is *The Phrygians*; and Socrates provides the firewood (for frying)'.<sup>13</sup>

And, moreover, he added: Εὐριπίδας σωκρατογόμφους,  
'Euripideses patched up by Socrates'.<sup>14</sup>

Thereafter, Diogenes Laertius provides the testimony of Callias in his *Captives*:

A) Τί δὴ σὺ σεμνὴ καὶ φρονεῖς οὕτω μέγα;

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<sup>8</sup> Researchers are divided regarding who the relative refers to, the subject of the verb in the phrase ὃν καὶ εἶπεῖν. The majority, including M. Gigante, J. Brunschwig or S. Mouraviev believe that it is Crates who is being mentioned. Others, such as Diels-Kranz, argued that it was Socrates, though this interpretation required them to eliminate the relative and the conjunction ὃν καὶ present in Long's edition. In this same line, Marcovich, in his edition of Diogenes Laertius, unjustifiably proposes reading the pronoun ἐκεῖνον to suggest that Socrates is being alluded to: '< ἐκεῖνον> (i. e. Socratem) addidi'. However, a conciliatory solution seems better: the relative indeed refers to Crates, but the conjunction καὶ has its usual adverbial meaning of 'also'. Hence, it turns out that Diogenes Laertius would have wanted to emphasize that the phrase of the Delian diver was attributed to both or that both coincided in their appreciation.

<sup>9</sup> It has been suggested that the striking coincidence between the names ΚΡΑΤΗΣ and ΣΩ-ΚΡΑΤΗΣ could be due to a corruption, Mouraviev 2000, 596.

<sup>10</sup> ἐδόκει δὲ συμποιεῖν Εὐριπίδῃ, D.L. 2. 18.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of these quotes, see Gallo 1983, 201-212.

<sup>12</sup> Teleclides fr. 41. There is a consensus among researchers that Diogenes Laertius confused Mnesilochus with Teleclides because in his *Life of Euripides*, 2 he had written that 'it's Mnesilochus who is cooking up some new play of Euripides, and Socrates is stoking the fire'. On this issue see the corresponding note by M. Narcy in Goulet-Cazé 1999, 227.

<sup>13</sup> The passage's comical tone is enhanced with the wordplay Φρύγες, 'Phrygians' and τὰ φρύγανα, 'firewood', if indeed, as suggested by M. Narcy in Goulet-Cazé 1999, 226, Φρύγες is not an incorrect interpretation of φρύγει, 'roast'.

<sup>14</sup> Teleclides fr. 42. The name Εὐριπίδας is found in its plural form, accompanied by the expressive adjective σωκρατογόμφους with the intention of conveying something like 'Euripidean verses riveted by Socrates'.

B) Ἐξεστι γὰρ μοι Σωκράτης γὰρ αἴτιος.  
(A) Pray why so solemn,<sup>15</sup> why this lofty air?  
(B) And well I may: for Socrates is the cause'.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Diogenes Laertius adds a third testimony from Aristophanes' *Clouds*:<sup>17</sup>

Εὐριπίδη δ' ὁ τὰς τραγωδίας ποιῶν τὰς περιλαλούσας οὐτός ἐστι, τὰς σοφάζ.

This is (i.d. Socrates) who composes for Euripides those wise tragedies, much sound and little sense.

It is clear from the reading of these passages that Euripides and Socrates were object of the comical authors' puns.<sup>18</sup> They were especially interested in making it known that Socrates was behind the composition of Euripides' works. This disclosure was the base for F. Nietzsche's well-known thesis that Socratic influence had rationalized and moralized Euripides' tragedies.<sup>19</sup> In any case, it is notorious that both Euripides and Socrates were turned into main characters of the comedies of the most renowned of all old comic dramatists, Aristophanes. He, indeed, ridiculed Euripides in many of his works, and devoted his entire comedy *The Clouds* to mock Socrates. Precisely in this work Euripides is mentioned as the 'wisest', in what could be an indirect allusion to Socrates' intervention in the composition of his tragedies.<sup>20</sup>

In a similar way, there is an allusion to the obsessive intervention of Socrates on Euripides' work, in the passage of the *Frogs* in which the chorus says to Euripides:

A man with keen intelligence is a blessed man; one can learn this in many ways. For this man having shown himself to have good sense is going back home again, for the benefit of his fellow-citizens, for the benefit of his friends and family, because his mind is keen. The elegant thing, then, is not to sit beside Socrates and chatter, abandoning art and jettisoning all that's best in the creation of tragedy. To spend one's time lazily on lofty phrases and splintering words is the sign of a man gone mad.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Researchers have been interested in the feminine adjective σεμνή: 'si debe supporre che un ignoto personaggio si rivolga ad un interlocutore femminile (...). Nom sembra difficile ipotizzare una canzonatura di Euripide, il quale, sia pure per interposta persona, forse la personificazione della Tragedia, ad es. in veste di sua moglie, o di specifica tragedia dal titolo femminile, si sentirebbe fiero e superbo di aver avuto in Socrate un suo sostituto come ideatore et compositore', I. Gallo 1983:206.

<sup>16</sup> Callias, *fr.* 15 Kassel-Austin.

<sup>17</sup> Ar. *Fr.* 392 Kassel- Austin. This sentence does not appear in the text of the *Clouds* that has arrived to us. This omission has led to believe that Diogenes Laertius would be citing a first edition of the work.

<sup>18</sup> 'Le tandem Socrate-Euripide (deux cibles de prédilection des auteurs de comedies)', Mouraviev in Goulet 2000, 596.

<sup>19</sup> It is well known that F. Nietzsche based his thesis on the degeneration of tragedy in Greece on the introduction of dialogue, in detriment of music and coral singing. Socrates' influence on Euripides would have been determinant for the culmination of this degenerative process. F. Nietzsche, who devoted his first philological work to study Diogenes Laertius' sources, knew the passage well: 'That Socrates had a close relationship to Euripides' attitude did not escape their contemporaries in ancient times, and the clearest expression for this happy intuition is that rumour running around Athens that Socrates was in the habit of helping Euripides with his poetry', *The Birth of Tragedy*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ar. *Nu.* 1377s. σοφώτατον γ' as expressing heated sarcasm', K. J. Dover, 1968, 256.

<sup>21</sup> Μακάριός γ' ἀνήρ ἔχων ξύνεσιν ἠκριβωμένην. Πάρα δὲ πολλοῖσιν μαθεῖν. Ὅδε γὰρ εὖ φρονεῖν δοκήσας πάλιν ἄπεισιν οἰκαδ' αὐθις, ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ μὲν τοῖς πολίταις, ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ δὲ τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ξυγγενέσι τε καὶ φίλοισι, διὰ τὸ συνετὸς εἶναι. Χαρίεν οὖν μὴ Σωκράτει παρακαθήμενον λαλεῖν, ἀποβαλόντα μουσικὴν τὰ τε μέγιστα παραλιπόντα τῆς τραγωδικῆς τέχνης. Τὸ δ' ἐπὶ σεμνοῖσιν λόγοισι καὶ σκαριφημοῖσι λήρων διατριβὴν ἀργὸν ποιεῖσθαι, παραφρονούντος ἀνδρός, Ar. *Ra.* 1482-1495. 'Il passaggio del dato di fatto,

Thus, Diogenes Laertius' interest in underlining that Euripides and Socrates' relation was frequently mocked in the comedies suggests that in his second version he was situating the origin of this story in a comical environment. Specifically, he did this when introducing the news that a certain Croton, in his work *The Diver*, had informed that a certain Crates was the introducer of Heraclitus' book in Greece and that, likewise, he had stated that a Delian diver was required in order not to drown in it. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that a title such as ὁ Κατακολυμβητής, *The Diver*, seems much more proper of a comical work than a philosophical treatise. Finally, it is noteworthy in this context, that as G. S. Kirk observed, the sentence attributed to Crates, Δηλίου τινὸς δεῖσθαι κολυμβητοῦ, ὃς οὐκ ἀποπνιγήσεται ἐν αὐτῷ, possess a iambic meter proper of a theatrical work.<sup>22</sup> If this were the case, the conversation on Heraclitus' book between Socrates and Euripides related by Diogenes Laertius would be nothing more than the reproduction of a dialogue extracted from a comical work.

Moreover, whatever the comical version or versions of these events, Socrates and Euripides' reputation made it easy for a conversation on the value of such an extravagant book as the one written by the enigmatic and misanthropist philosopher from Ephesus to be attributed to them. Hence, on the one hand, Euripides was known for having an important book collection, as Athenaeus related when he included him in a list of the most prominent book owners of the Classical Antiquity<sup>23</sup>. The bibliophilia of the tragical author would explain the news that it was indeed Euripides who had taken Heraclitus of Ephesus' book to Athens, and then offered it to Socrates. This is how Tatian relates it: 'I cannot approve of Heraclitus, who, being self-taught and arrogant, said, 'I have explored myself.' Nor can I praise him for hiding his poem in the temple of Artemis, in order that it might be published afterwards as a mystery; and those who take an interest in such things say that Euripides the tragic poet came there and read it, and, gradually learning it by heart, carefully handed down to posterity this darkness'.<sup>24</sup>

As we will see, if Euripides did indeed travel to memorize Heraclitus' book, it was most probably to the temple of Artemis, in the city of Ephesus, where the philosopher had left it, as recounted also by Diogenes Laertius.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Socrates' love for reading was also well known. This inclination would explain his interest for Heraclitus' book that Euripides had made available to him. Hence, Xenophon attributed the following sentence to Socrates: 'The treasures, too, of the wise men of old, which they have left written in books, I turn over and peruse in company with my friends, and if we find anything good in them, we pick it out, and think it a great gain if we thus become useful to one another.'<sup>26</sup>

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estremamente verosimile, di una lunga consuetudine tra il poeta e il filosofo, con conseguente influenza (a mio parere reciproca e non a senso unico) sul piano culturale e ideologico, alla maligna e canzonatoria invenzione di un effettivo intervento di Socrate nella redazione dei drammi euripidei non poteva essere compiuto che dalla commedia contemporanea, per un motivo facile da spiegare: agli effetti comici sul pubblico teatrale riusciva molto più efficace far passare Socrate come attivo collaboratore nell'officina poetica di Euripide che non limitarsi a presentare a Euripide quale interprete o banditore sulla scena delle idee di Socrate', I. Gallo, 'Citazioni comiche nella *vita Socratis* di Diogene Laerzio', *Vichiana* 12 (1983:203).

<sup>22</sup> 'The iambic rhythm is noticeable, and supports the possibility of a dramatic origin', Kirk 1954,10. On this issue see S. Mouraviev, *Heraclitea*, III 1 (2003:206).

<sup>23</sup> *Ath. Deipn.* 1, 4, 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Tacian Or. ad Gr.* 3.

<sup>25</sup> D.L. 9. 6.

<sup>26</sup> καὶ τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῶν πάλαι σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν, οὓς ἐκεῖνοι κατέλιπον ἐν βιβλίοις γράψαντες, ἀνελίττων κοινῇ σὺν τοῖς φίλοις διέρχομαι, καὶ ἅν τι ὀρώμεν ἀγαθὸν ἐκλεγόμεθα, X. *Mem.* I, 6, 14.

This Socratic attitude, relating reading with friendship, is reflected perfectly in the *Phaedrus*, dialogue in which, at a *locus amoenus*, under the pleasant shade of a plane tree and close to a stream, after Socrates' insistence, Phaedrus reads a speech by Lysias that he carried under his cloak. Moreover, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates informed of the experience of learning of another philosopher's book when 'I heard someone who had a book of Anaxagoras, as he said, out of which he read that mind was the disposer and cause of all, and I was quite delighted at the notion of this, which appeared admirable'. However, the reading turns to disenchantment when 'what hopes I had formed, and how grievously was I disappointed! As I proceeded, I found my philosopher altogether forsaking mind or any other principle of order, but having recourse to air, and ether, and water, and other eccentricities'<sup>27</sup>. Finally, in the *Protagoras* before discussing with the sophist the meaning of diverse expressions and words in Simonides' poem, and when asked by the sophist about his knowledge of the poem, Socrates answered 'I am perfectly well acquainted with the ode — I have made a careful study of it'.<sup>28</sup>

These three examples show that Socrates did indeed share his readings with his friends and companions and that he discussed and openly expressed his opinion. In any case, his judgment of Anaxagoras' book demonstrates that Socrates was also used to reading books by 'Presocratic' philosophers, among which Heraclitus' should be included. In this way, given his reputation as a critical reader, if his opinion regarding the philosopher from Ephesus had been uttered by Socrates as a character in a comical work, his well-known relation with Euripides would have also been used, on the one hand, to underscore the proverbial Socratic irony and mordacity and, on the other, to mock the notorious obscurity of the Heraclitean book.

### **Why can only a Delian diver understand Heraclitus?**

After examining the comical context in which Socrates' assertion could have taken place, we still have to analyze the cause that motivated the answer. First, given that it is an opinion about Heraclitus attributed to Socrates, it is surprising that it has been interpreted in its immediate sense, as if comprehending the intricacies of Heraclitean philosophy actually required a Delian diver. Indeed, although it is obvious that the allusion to the diver points with some malice to the sensation of dark deepness felt by Heraclitus' readers, it is not clear why the diver had to be from the island of Delos, instead of from the islands of Samos, Quios or Lesbos, for instance.<sup>29</sup> Could it be that Delian divers had a special trait that distinguished them from the rest? As we mentioned at the beginning of this paper, researchers that have tried to offer an explanation have merely stated that Delian divers were skilled sponge or pearl fishermen.<sup>30</sup> Other explanations, such as the fact that the island of Delos was where the sea god Glaucus, presumed divinity of divers, was worshiped, do not enrich the comprehension of the

<sup>27</sup> Pl. *Phd.* 97c-98c. In *Phd.* 60b-61b, Socrates also relates his familiarity with Aesopus' fables.

<sup>28</sup> Pl. *Prt.* 339b.

<sup>29</sup> In other words: the difficulty of understanding the phrase is not in the substantive, but in the adjective. The metaphor of the diver is almost a natural consequence of what is said in some heraclitean fragments, as the fragment DK 22 B 45 that refers to the depth of the soul: 'You will not find out the limits of the soul by going, even if you travel over every day, so deep is its *logos*', ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο, πᾶσαν ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει. In fact, other authors as Aeschylus *Supp.* 407 had appealed to it to express the need for a deep thought: 'we need a deep thought to save us, like a diver who goes to the bottom with his eyes open', δεῖ τοι βαθείας φροντίδος σωτηρίου, δίκην κολυμβητήρος ἐς βυθὸν μολεῖν δεδορκὸς ὄμμα. On this question, see Kahn 1979, 312, n. 117.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, in his translation of the passage, Mouraviev 2003,77, identifies, without further explanation, the Delian diver with a pearl fisher: 'un plongeur de Delos [= un pêcheur de perles]'.

sentence either.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the need for a Delian diver has been interpreted as the requirement having expert in fishing for pearls to dive to the bottom of the inextricable Heraclitean fragments and obtain something valuable from them, such as a treasure.

However, if we examine the three late sources that cited this expression, we will realize that none explains why the diver necessarily had to be from the island of Delos. Hence, the first instance this is mentioned, in the *Suda*, includes this definition of ‘Delian diver’: ‘This was said in reference to a book of Heraclitus, because it was hard to understand, that it needed a Delian diver who would not be drowned in it. (...) a Delian diver, in reference to those who swim deep. For when Euripides gave Socrates a book by Heraclitus the Obscure, Euripides asked, “How does it seem?” and he (sc. Socrates) said, “What I have understood is excellent, and I suppose what I have not understood is also; but it needs a Delian diver not to drown in it. And a proverb: a Delian diver, referring to those who are very experienced at swimming.”<sup>32</sup>

Note that the *Suda* combines both passages offered by Diogenes Laertius, almost transcribing them literally. The first part corresponds with the second passage, including the space that we have not translated and that refers to the diverse titles that Heraclitus’ book might have had.<sup>33</sup> These titles fully coincide with those offered by Diogenes Laertius IX 12 immediately after having related the anecdote of the Delian diver. However, it is very striking that despite literally citing the sentence ‘it needs a Delian diver not to drown in it’, its author, Crates, is omitted. Diogenes Laertius had attributed this sentence to Crates, together with the detail, which was also omitted, of having introduced Heraclitus’ book into Greece. Conversely, when mentioning Euripides and Socrates’ well-known answer, the *Suda* fuses both of Diogenes Laertius’ versions into one, leading to the impression that its author is only Socrates.

Finally, the *Suda* merely explains the expression ‘Delian diver’ as ‘those who swim deep’<sup>34</sup> and to those who are very experienced at swimming. These explanations afford no new information beyond what can be deduced, almost tautologically, from the expression itself and its context. Moreover, not a word is given to clarify why the diver needed to be from Delos, although an explanation is given in the section the *Suda* encyclopedia devoted to treat the word ‘Delos’ and the adjective ‘Delian’.

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<sup>31</sup> Frost 1968, 181-182. The explanation given by the author is vague. No special relation with the divers from Delos can be deduced from the fact that Aristotle had mentioned a certain relation between Glaucus, sea god, with the island of Delos in a commentary included in his *Constitution of the Delians*, as Athenaeus informed, *Deipn.* 7, 47, 27. Moreover, to demonstrate this presumed relation, Frost resorted to the same expression ‘Delian diver’ that can be read in Diogenes Laertius.

<sup>32</sup> Δηλίου κολυμβητοῦ: τοῦτο ἐρρήθη εἰς βιβλίον Ἡρακλείτου διὰ τὸ δυσνόητον, Δηλίου τινὸς δεῖσθαι κολυμβητοῦ, ὃς οὐκ ἀποπνιγῆσεται ἐν αὐτῷ. ἐπιγράφουσι δὲ αὐτὸ οἱ μὲν Μούσας, οἱ δὲ Περί φύσεως, Διόδοτος δὲ Ἀκριβὲς οἰάκισμα πρὸς στάθμην βίου, ἄλλοι Γνώμην ἠθῶν, Κόσμον τρόπων ἐνὸς τῶν ξυμπάντων. ἢ οὕτως: Δηλίου κολυμβητοῦ, ἐπὶ τῶν ἄκρως νηχομένων. Σωκράτει γὰρ δόντος τοῦ Εὐριπίδου Ἡρακλείτου τοῦ Σκοτεινοῦ σύγγραμμα, ἐρέσθαι, τί δοκεῖ τὸν δὲ φάναί: ἃ μὲν συνήκα γενναία: οἶμαι δὲ καὶ ἃ μὴ συνήκα: πλὴν Δηλίου δεῖται κολυμβητοῦ εἰς τὸ μὴ ἀποπνιγῆναι ἐν αὐτῷ. καὶ παροιμία: Δῆλιος κολυμβητής, ἐπὶ τῶν πάνυ ἐμπεύρων νήχεσθαι, *Suda* Δ 400.

<sup>33</sup> ἐπιγράφουσι δὲ αὐτὸ οἱ μὲν Μούσας, οἱ δὲ Περί φύσεως, Διόδοτος δὲ Ἀκριβὲς οἰάκισμα πρὸς στάθμην βίου, ἄλλοι Γνώμην ἠθῶν, Κόσμον τρόπων ἐνὸς τῶν ξυμπάντων. ‘Some entitle [this book] Muses, others On Nature. Diodotos [calls it] ‘A helm unerring for the rule of life,’ others ‘a guide of conduct, the ordering of character, for one [and] all’.

<sup>34</sup> We translate the expression τῶν ἄκρως νηχομένων, as ‘swimmers that dive deep’ rather than, as S. Mouraviev does ‘de nageurs parfaits’, because it seems to us that in this context the adverb ἄκρως refers to the depth of the sea.

The lack of interest for the diver's origin is even more evident in the two remaining sources. Both of them omitted the detail that the diver had to be from the island of Delos. Hence, the following passage by David from his commentary of Porphyry's *Isagoge* reads:

lack of clarity stems from both the style and theories, such as the theories of Heraclitus. Indeed, they are deep and formidable, because it is said of the writings of Heraclitus that they require a deep diver.<sup>35</sup>

The third testimony, by Elias, also from his commentary of Porphyry's *Isagoge* was expressed in a similar way:

there are three modes of the lack of clarity in which young people abstain from resorting to books: either because of their dark or the depth of the thoughts (for what someone said that the writings of Heraclitus need a deep diver).<sup>36</sup>

Both passages are very similar. Although they both underline the obscurity and depth of Heraclitus' book to the point of requiring a diver accustomed to the depths of the sea, there is no allusion to his Delian origin.

Hence, the little or null importance awarded by these testimonies to the fact that the diver had to be from Delos, suggests that during the Classical Antiquity the divers from this island were not considered to have any special ability, nor to carry out any specific activity that distinguished them from the divers from other islands or coastal regions.

However, and despite that silence, it does not seem that mentioning the diver's Delian origin was fortuitous. On the contrary, the use of this word must have intended to underscore the difficulty of penetrating in the dark depths of Heraclitean thought with the intention of intensifying the comical effect. To put it another way, the Delian condition of the diver, far from alluding to a true diver from that island, was intended to underline some characteristic feature of Heraclitus' book directly related with his reputation for obscurity and depth.

If this is the case, it should not be surprising at all that the island of Delos was the one chosen to refer to a diver of the gloomy Heraclitean waters. This is because this island was the place of birth and worship of the two closest divinities to Heraclitus: the gods Apollo and Artemis, the twin brothers of Zeus and Leto. This is where the Ionians went to honor them, as told in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo:

And you, O lord Apollo, god of the silver bow, shooting afar, now walked on craggy Cynthus, and now kept wandering about the island and the people in them. Many are your temples and wooded groves, and all peaks and towering bluffs of lofty mountains and rivers flowing to the sea are dear to you, Phoebus, yet in Delos do you most delight your heart; for there the long robed Ionians gather in your honour with their children and shy wives: mindful, they delight you with boxing and dancing and song, so often as they hold their gathering. A man would say that they were deathless and unageing if he should then come upon the Ionians so met together. For he would see the graces of them all, and would be pleased in heart gazing at the men and well-girded women with their swift ships and great wealth. And there is this great wonder besides -- and its renown shall never perish -- the girls of Delos, hand-maidens of the Far-shooter; for when they have praised Apollo first, and also Leto and Artemis who delights in arrows, they sing a strain-telling of men and women of past days, and charm the tribes of men.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the connection between Heraclitus and Apollo, the lord of Delphi, is notorious, and its analysis exceeds the objective of this paper. In relation to this, though,

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<sup>35</sup> γίνεται τοίνυν ἡ ἀσάφεια ἢ ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν θεωρημάτων. καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν θεωρημάτων, ὡς ἔχει τὰ Ἡρακλείτεια· ταῦτα γὰρ βαθέα καὶ δεινὰ ὑπάρχει περὶ γὰρ τῶν συγγραμμάτων Ἡρακλείτου εἴρηται δεῖσθαι βαθέος κολυμβητοῦ, David, in *Porph. Isag.* 4.

<sup>36</sup> τρεῖς γὰρ τρόποι εἰσὶν ἀσαφείας, δι' οὓς ἀποκνοῦσιν οἱ νέοι τοῖς βιβλίοις ἐντυγχάνειν· ἢ γὰρ διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὸν καὶ ὑποβρύχιον τῶν νοημάτων, ὡς τὰ Ἡρακλείτεια (διὸ καὶ τις τὰ Ἡρακλείτου ἔφη βαθέος δεῖσθαι κολυμβητοῦ, Elias, in *Porph. Isagog.* 42.31.

<sup>37</sup> *H. Hom. to Apollo* III 140-162.

let us recall a fragment by Heraclitus that enigmatically stated the following: ‘The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign’.<sup>38</sup> This statement is complemented with his description of the Delphic Sibyl: ‘The Sibyl with raving mouth utters things mirthless and unadorned and unperfumed, and her voice carries through a thousand years because of the god who speaks through her’.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Heraclitus’ celebrity was founded on similar perplexity and uncertainty caused by the Pythian Sibyl among her listeners, who found her oracles ambiguous, obscure, and enigmatic, to the point of needing interpreters who could clarify them.<sup>40</sup> The need for a guide, an interpreter, to understand Heraclitus’ book, is precisely what is proposed in the epigram dedicated by Diogenes Laertius to Heraclitus:

Don’t unroll too hastily to get to the end of Heraclitus  
The Ephesian’s book: the path is hard to travel.  
Darkness and gloom without light are there. But if an initiate  
Leads you on the way, it becomes brighter than the radiance of the sun.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that Lucian, another satirical author, had mocked the association between the obscurity of Heraclitus and of Apollo’s oracle is very relevant for our study. Indeed, Lucian described a dialogue between a merchant and the philosopher from Ephesus with his usual mordacity. When stating, in the purest Heraclitean style, that “men are mortal gods and the gods men immortal”

the merchant replied: “As Loxias (Apollo’s surname)<sup>42</sup> did not manifest anything with simplicity”.<sup>43</sup>

It is obvious, thus, that Lucian believed that there was a direct connection between Heraclitus’ lack of clarity and the enigmatic expression of the oracle of Apollo, and that his pun had no intention but to underscore an equivalence that was manifest to the readers of Heraclitus’ book.

Hence, considered from this point of view, the mention of the island of Delos, in which, as it is well known, there was a very important sanctuary dedicated to Apollo, only surpassed by the one in Delphos, was nothing more than an allusion to Heraclitus’ sibylline way of expressing himself.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the island of Delos, consecrated to

<sup>38</sup> ὁ ἄναξ, οὐ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει, DK 22 B 93.

<sup>39</sup> Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν, DK 22 B 92.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Both the Pythia and the Sibyl are women who serve as ‘mediums’, who see the future in a trance experience, in the superhuman vision of the god. It is the woman’s voice that speaks, but it is Apollo’s word that is uttered’, Kahn (1979:125).

<sup>41</sup> μὴ ταχὺς Ἡρακλείτου ἐπ’ ὀμφαλὸν εἶλεε βίβλον  
τοῦφεισίου μάλα τοι δύσβατος ἀτραπιτός.  
ὄρφνη καὶ σκότος ἐστὶν ἀλάμπητον· ἦν δὲ σε μύστης  
εἰσαγάγη, φανεροῦ λαμπρότερον ἡελίου. D. L. IX 16.

<sup>42</sup> The name ‘Loxias’ is formed from the adjective *loxos* that initially means ‘crossed’, ‘oblique’. When applied to language, it means, ‘indirect’, ‘ambiguous’. Hence, Loxias, in reference to Apollo, alludes to the ambiguous and enigmatic character of its oracles.

<sup>43</sup> Αἰνίγματα λέγεις, ὦ οὔτος, ἢ γρίφους συντίθεις;

ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ ὥσπερ ὁ Λοξίας οὐδὲν ἀποσαφείς, Lucianus, *Vit. auct.* 14. 21-22.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Heraclitus not only admires the oracular style of delivery, but recommends it; this studied ambiguity is, I think, celebrated and alluded to in the Delian diver comment. For just as the prophecies of the Delian diver or Delphic god are at once obscure and darkly clear, so too are the workings of the Logos and Heraclitus’ remarks on it’, Chitwood 2004, 74.

Apollo, to the extent that this god was referred to as “Delian Sovereign”, Δήλι’ ἄναξ,<sup>45</sup> would have substituted Delphos as the oracle center for the simple reason that this island, without losing the reference to Apollo, would have allowed the metaphor of the diver in the depths of the sea. This would have been impossible in the case of Delphos, for its distance from the sea and its contours full of mountains and caverns.<sup>46</sup>

In this context we must mention the fact that, according also to Diogenes Laertius, Pythagoras included a “Delian fisherman” in the list of characters that he remembered having been in his previous incarnations, precisely the one prior to being Pythagoras. The succession of incarnations offered by Diogenes Laertius is the following: First, Aethalides, the presumed son of Hermes, who awarded him the gift of remembering his lives after death. Then Euphorbus and, after him, Hermodimus, who visited the Branchidae, in whose temple he recognized the shield that Menelaus had dedicated to Apollo. After Hermodimus he was Pyrrhus, a fisherman of Delos, and after him he was finally reincarnated in Pythagoras.

Even though a fisherman is not the same as a diver, (especially in the case of the metaphor we are dealing with because whereas the fisherman fishes from the surface, the diver submerges into the dark depths of the sea)<sup>47</sup> the fact that both share the adjective ‘Delian’ suggests that the Laertian passage deserves detailed attention. And this analysis leads to a conclusion that supports our thesis: that the list of Pythagoras’ incarnations is also directly related with the god with which his followers identified him: the Hyperborean Apollo.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, leaving Aethalides aside, which serves as a pretext to connect the gift of remembering prior lives with Hermes, Euphorbus, as underlined by Kerényi, is presented in the *Iliad*<sup>49</sup> as protected by Apollo, which afforded the identification of Pythagoras with this god.<sup>50</sup> Hermodimus is directly linked with Apollo in the passage by Diogenes Laertius due to his visit to the Branchidae, the priests of the temple and oracle of Apollo in Didyma. Finally, in this context, mentioning the Delian diver, as a prior incarnation of Pythagoras, seems to be oriented to keeping his relation with Apollo in his prior incarnations. This is achieved by the allusion to the island of Delos, consecrated to him.<sup>51</sup>

Hence, we consider that, as in the case of the allusion to the Delian diver, the Delian origin of the fisherman Pyrrhus is also a direct link with Apollo, in this case to strengthen the god’s identity with Pythagoras.

<sup>45</sup> Orph. Hymn. 33. 8. Cf. Virg. Aen. 6. 12, Eclog. 7. 29.

<sup>46</sup> In this case, understanding Heraclitus would require ‘an alpinist, or a speleologist from Delphi’. Ultimately, what we are insinuating is that the joke of the diver of the depths must be adapted to a geological contour that allowed the diver metaphor in relation to the oracular style, and the island of Delos was the only place that allowed this. If this joke, *mutatis mutandis*, had been applied to Heidegger, renowned inheritor of the Heraclitean darkness, it could have gone something like, to understand the complex German philosopher ‘an alpinist from the Black Forest is needed’. This would allude to his famous cabin of Todtnauberg, at the top of the Todtnau Mountain, where he wrote part of his most renowned book, *Sein und Zeit*.

<sup>47</sup> The same can be said of the mimeographer Herodas’ 3.51 allusion to a Delian fisherman, Δήλιος κυρτεύς. The name κυρτεύς is used to refer to the art of lobster fishing κύρτη, yet this mention does not add any relevant information about his condition of fisherman nor his Delian origin.

<sup>48</sup> D. L. 8. 11; Iamb. VP 140.

<sup>49</sup> Il. 16. 849-850.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Durch die Identität mit Euphorbos gelangt Pythagoras ganz in der Nähe von Apollon’, Kerényi 1950, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Burkert 1972, 138, n. 104 indirectly suggested this link when arguing that ‘perhaps some Delian ritual lies in the background’ of the expression ‘Delian diver’. What rituals and ceremonies could these be other than those directly related with Apollo and his worship on the island of Delos?

Likewise, we must not overlook that the name of the island, *Delos*, alludes to the concept of brilliance, clarity, and transparency, the meanings of the homonymous adjective δῆλος in Greek. Several explanations have been offered for the origin of this name. The mythological story tells that Apollo, as a proof of gratitude, changed the name of the floating island in which he was born, initially called Ortygia, for Delos, ‘visible’ ‘manifest’, ‘clear’.<sup>52</sup> In any case, and leaving aside the motive for its name, it is evident that, for a Greek, the name of Delos was associated to the concept of clarity. Thus, the expression Δηλίου κολυμβητου ‘Delian diver’ becomes a kind of oxymoron that would have satisfied Heraclitus himself, so attracted to this kind of word play.<sup>53</sup> Notice that the oxymoron would mean something like someone skilled in diving in the ‘transparent depths’ of Delos. That is to say, a guide, someone capable of introducing some light in the Heraclitean darkness, as asserted in the epigram dedicated to Heraclitus by Diogenes Laertius.

Finally, the fact that Heraclitus had placed his book in the temple of Artemis, in his birth city of Ephesus, as informed also by Diogenes Laertius, strengthens the connection with the island of Delos (reinforcing his relation with his brother Apollo, the oracular center of Delphi and the island of Delos.<sup>54</sup>) Certainly, whatever the motive that led Heraclitus to leave his book in such a renowned temple,<sup>55</sup> the fact that it was consecrated to Artemis, established a close relation with the divinity responsible for its custody and, by extension, with the island of Delos, the place of birth and worship of Apollo’s unfriendly sister.

In conclusion, the expression attributed to Socrates that a Delian diver was required to comprehend the book by Heraclitus must be understood in a mocking and metaphorical sense. Thus, and according to this interpretation, not only is a diver required to reach its depths, but he must necessarily be Delian. This means that he must be someone versed in the arcane oracles of the god Apollo to be able to move freely in the sibylline depths of Heraclitean thought. This explains why an answer that was supposed to be witty and ingenious, put in Socrates’ mouth<sup>56</sup> with the intention of

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Delos, celebrated for its temple of Apollo . . . According to the story, Delos for a long time floated adrift . . . Aristotle has recorded that it owes its name to its having suddenly appeared emerging from the water ...’, Plin. *Nat.* 4.66.

<sup>53</sup> As a sample of this kind of Heraclitean wordplay, let us note the following: ‘Greater deaths (*moirai*) are allotted greater destinies (*moirai*)’, DK 22 B 25. S. Mouraviev’s exhaustive analysis of the etymological games present in the fragments, found in his monumental *Heraclitea*, saves us any supplementary consideration.

<sup>54</sup> The relation of Artemis with Apollo and Delphi is underscored in the *Homeric Hymn XXVII to Artemis* 12-20: ‘But the goddess with a bold heart turns every way destroying the race of wild beasts: and when she is satisfied and has cheered her heart, this huntress who delights in arrows slackens her supple bow and goes to the great house of her dear brother Phoebus Apollo, to the rich land of Delphi, there to order the lovely dance of the Muses and Graces. There she hangs up her curved bow and her arrows, and heads and leads the dances, gracefully arrayed, while all they utter their heavenly voice, singing how neat-ankled Leto bare children supreme among the immortals both in thought and in deed’.

<sup>55</sup> For a compendium of the diverse interpretations that have been offered to explain Heraclitus’ action, see S. Mouraviev, *Heraclitea* III. 1 (2003:203s).

<sup>56</sup> Although this issue cannot be analyzed in detail here, the strong connection between Socrates and Apollo also needs to be underlined. The relevance of this relation is such that Diogenes Laertius 2. 42 informs that Socrates had written a paean in honor of Apollo and Artemis:

All hail, Apollo, Delos’ lord!

Hail Artemis, ye noble pair!

Δήλι' Ἀπολλων χαῖρε, καὶ Ἄρτεμι, παῖδε κλεινῶ.

The relation between Socrates and Apollo is well known, especially for the famous answer of the Delfos Oracle to Chaerophon’s query that, according to Diogenes Laertius 2. 37, pointed to Socrates as the wisest man: ἀνδρῶν ἀπάντων Σωκράτης σοφώτατος. Cf. Pl. *Ap.* 20e-21a; X. *Ap.* 14.

producing a comical effect, had resorted to the island of Delos, 'the transparent', 'The clear', to refer to the deep water diver. The superficial and literal sense of a Delian diver alluding to an actual pearl or sponge fisherman from that island does not fit with the comical context in which it was expressed, nor with Socrates' incisive irony, nor, obviously, with the enigmatic and pretentious Heraclitean style. If, conversely, the notion of a Delian diver is understood not as a reference to a true diver from that island, but a metaphorical locution to describe the difficulty to manage the enigmatic and sibylline depths of Heraclitean thought, the hidden meaning of that expression is disclosed. And paraphrasing Diogenes Laertius' epigram again, only with the aid of the Delian diver, the deep Delian waters become clearer and brighter than sunlight.

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