

EMPEDOCLES *ARBITER SYMPOSI*: LUXURY, POLITICAL EQUALITY, AND BIZARRE DINNER PARTIES IN FIFTH-CENTURY ACRAGAS*

Abstract: This paper analyses Empedocles' contribution to Sicilian politics as described by the ancient sources cited by Diogenes Laertius. It offers a close analysis of a bizarre anecdote by Timaeus (*FGrHist* 566 F 134), where Empedocles got rid of a potential tyrant to preserve political equality, also in the light of other ancient accounts in which Empedocles is described as a man of his people.

Keywords: Empedocles, Timaeus, Diogenes Laertius, ancient biography, tyranny

1. Introduction:

The Philosophers' Lives between Facts and Fiction

Ancient biographies of the Presocratic thinkers, which can be consulted primarily in the kaleidoscopic collection by Diogenes Laertius, are often overlooked and labelled as the product of a frighteningly vivid imagination.¹ Arguably, it is not possible to sketch a faithful biography for these individuals on the basis of such unreliable information. Among Greek philosophers, Empedocles of Acragas has unsurprisingly attracted consistent biographical interest: both the diverse expertise displayed in his poetry, covering physics, zoology, medicine, and religion, and his claimed abilities to resuscitate a dead body and to manipulate the weather (B 111 D–K = D 43 L–M), are especially enthralling. The coexistence of rational as well as irrational skills, together with his charismatic aura, inevitably piqued curiosity about his life in later ages. This article will argue that, while biographical information

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¹ Diogenes wrote between the second and the third century CE and mostly relied, probably second-hand, on Hellenistic biographies: see Arrighetti (1987), Goulet (2003) 79–96, Grau I Guijarro (2009) 55–87, Hägg (2012) 67–98, Fletcher and Hanink (2016) 3–28. For his chronology and for modern literature on the problem, see Jouanna (2009), who proposes to place Diogenes' *floruit* in the mid-third century CE (one generation after Sextus Empiricus).

about Empedocles does not provide a historically accurate account, it is nonetheless relevant for understanding the reception of the philosopher's personality and the environment in which this portrait emerged.

Empedocles was in antiquity regarded not only as a philosopher, but also as a poet (as Diogenes remarks, 8.57–8).² It has become a staple of modern scholarship that ancient biographers used to distil most of their information about the poets from their own poems: Aristotle and his students, for example, were especially keen to exploit the poets' verses when dealing with their lives.³ In addition, such biographies also serve as forms of exegesis and provide a key to understanding how the poets' work was later interpreted, as demonstrated by the seminal studies of Lefkowitz and Graziosi.⁴ Similarly, bits of philosophical doctrine could be exploited for biographical needs: ancient philosophy was actually deemed to be a 'way of life', i.e., an art of living aimed at self-improvement, and philosophers were supposed to behave in conformity with their own precepts, especially from the Hellenistic age onwards.⁵ Even earlier, one can legitimately detect a Pythagorean 'way of life': suffice it to think of dietary restrictions (e.g., beans and certain animals) and of the zealous observance of specific religious rituals.⁶ Therefore, biographers like Diogenes Laertius would have found it very tempting to discover consistency between the life and the doctrines of early philosophers, who perhaps did not yet conceive philosophical investigation as a 'way of life'.⁷

² Poets' lives have already been subjected to thorough critical analysis pinpointing the sources, methods, and aims of their construction. Fundamental is the approach outlined in Lefkowitz (2012), who has consistently argued for the fictionality of the poets' lives. Kivilo (2010) agrees with Lefkowitz's overall picture but believes that we can grasp something true about the poets' lives from the extant biographical material. For an orientation about philosophers' lives, see Grau I Guijarro (2009) 7–53 and the papers collected in Bonazzi and Schorn (2016).

³ As demonstrated by Arrighetti (1987) 170–7. Cf. the passages listed in Horky (2016) 48 n. 44.

⁴ On this further point of utmost relevance, see Lefkowitz (2012) and Graziosi (2002) on Homer's lives.

⁵ Hadot (1995) described ancient philosophy as antithetical to modern philosophy: while the latter's target is purely specialists, the former developed a message for all humankind, an actual art of living (*manière de vivre*). See also the collection of essays in Chase–Clark–McGhee (2013).

⁶ The extant ancient accounts about the Pythagorean diet unfortunately are not consistent with one another: for a thorough overview of Pythagorean precepts, see Gemelli Marciano (2014). For 'philosophy as a way of life' as a useful category to approach Pythagorean (and also Empedoclean) ethics, see Macris (2013) esp. 65–8.

⁷ Similar remarks in Warren (2007) 139, 149, with stress on the Greek way of life. However, he does not go so far as to claim that this conception of 'philosophy as a way of life' might lie behind Diogenes' choice to structure his doxographical exposition in the form of biography. Diogenes himself, when talking about the Cynics (6.103), refers to the opinion

However, despite Empedocles' reputation as a charismatic spiritual guide spawned by his self-presentation in his poems,⁸ not all biographical narratives are incontrovertibly inspired by his verses. For example, the most famous and fascinating episode of his life, namely his suicidal dive into the Etna volcano, was probably not directly (and not only) inspired by specific passages of his poetry.⁹ Narratives of that kind are indeed not rare when it comes to the death of larger than life individuals.¹⁰ Consequently, once Empedocles attained the status of an exceptional man, such recurring themes could well be applied to his life. Although it is often not possible to recover trustworthy information in Diogenes' sometimes random mishmash of information, it can be profitable to read such evidence against the historical and intellectual backdrop that informed it. A deeper understanding of the environment(s) shaping these narratives promises to pay double, both shedding light on the sources' literary agendas and allowing us a glimpse of the history and the society of a particular moment in time.

In what follows, I discuss a section of Empedocles' biography by Diogenes (8.63–6, 72) where the portrait of 'Empedocles the democrat' emerges. Hellenistic biographers like Timaeus of Tauromenium and Xanthus of Lydia mostly inform these paragraphs. Horkey has argued that Timaeus of Tauromenium portrayed Empedocles as a 'staunch defender of democracy', in direct response to Aristotle, who believed him to actually have anarchist inclinations.¹¹ I argue against this interpretation and offer a re-assessment of this passage both in the light of Timaeus' historiographical practice and of the Sicilian historical setting.¹²

according to which they were not to be considered as a 'school' (*αἵρεσις*) proper, but only as sharing a specific 'way of life' (*ἐντασις βίου*). On this and similar cases, see Verhasselt (2019) 455–65.

⁸ Esp. in B 111 D–K = D 43 L–M and B 112 D–K = D 4 L–M.

⁹ As Lapini (2003) 98–9 and n. 1 at 91 has keenly observed. Differently, Chitwood (2004) 48–56 explains all the narratives as based on the four roots theory. Bidez (1894) 35–40 and Kingsley (1995a) 250–77 offer more nuanced treatments, focusing on the purificatory function of fire.

¹⁰ Grau I Guijarro (2009) 201–505 offers a thorough overview of such recurring narrative patterns in Diogenes' lives, including those about miracles and deaths.

¹¹ Horkey (2016) 59.

¹² Timaeus came from Sicily, so he must have known the local background of that time very well. Murray (1972) 210 has effectively described Timaeus as 'the Herodotus of the West', since the scope of his work encompassed various aspects of cultural history. Regrettably, Timaeus' history has come down to us only in fragmentary form, and, as a consequence, many issues about his literary production are open to great speculation. For his treatment of Pythagoras and Empedocles, see, to name but a few, Brown (1958) 50–5, Pearson (1987) 113–18, Vattuone (1991) 210–36, and Baron (2013) 138–69, who stresses the limits of our knowledge due to the tendentious selection by the intermediate authors of

2. Empedocles, his Biographers, and Political Life in Fifth Century Acragas

As anticipated, according to Diogenes Laertius Empedocles cuts a figure of considerable influence in fifth-century Acragas. Tellingly, all the sources quoted (Aristotle, Xanthus of Lydia, Neanthes of Cyzicum, and Timaeus of Tauromenium) nod towards a representation of Empedocles as opposing the tyrant archetype. The core of this section is, without doubt, the obscure episode of the dinner party described in detail by Timaeus (Diog. Laert. 8.63–4 = *FGrHist* 566 F 134), who tells the story of how Empedocles, a member of Acragas' aristocracy (Diog. Laert. 8.51 = P 8 L–M), was once invited to a symposium together with the magistrates of the city. Even if this passage has been generally dismissed as a humorous tale with no value, yet Timaeus (and Diogenes) knew it as the *ἀρχή* of Empedocles' political involvement:

φησὶ δ' αὐτὸν [scil. Ἐμπεδοκλέα] καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης [fr. 66 Rose = *de poet.* *F 71 Janko] ἐλεύθερον γεγονέναι καὶ πάσης ἀρχῆς ἀλλότριον, εἴ γε τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῷ διδομένην παρητήσατο, καθάπερ Ξάνθος [*FGrHist* 765 F 33] ἐν τοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγει, τὴν λιτότητα δηλονότι πλέον ἀγαπήσας. (64) τὰ δ' αὐτὰ καὶ Τίμαιος εἴρηκε, τὴν αἰτίαν ἅμα παρατιθέμενος τοῦ δημοτικὸν εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα. φησὶ γὰρ ὅτι κληθεὶς ὑπὸ τινος τῶν ἀρχόντων ὡς προβαίνοντος τοῦ δείπνου τὸ ποτὸν οὐκ εἰσεφέρετο, τῶν {δ'} ἄλλων ἡσυχάζοντων, μισοπονήρως διατιθεὶς ἐκέλευσεν εἰσφέρειν· ὁ δὲ κεκληκὼς ἀναμένειν ἔφη τὸν τῆς βουλῆς ὑπηρέτην. ὡς δὲ παρεγένετο, ἐγενήθη συμποσίαρχος, τοῦ κεκληκὸτος δηλονότι καταστήσαντος, ὅς ὑπεγράφετο τυραννίδος ἀρχὴν· ἐκέλευσε γὰρ ἢ πίνειν ἢ καταχεῖσθαι τῆς κεφαλῆς. τότε μὲν οὖν ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἡσύχασε· τῇ δὲ ὑστεραίᾳ εἰσαγαγὼν εἰς δικαστήριον ἀπέκτεινε καταδικάσας ἀμφοτέρους, τὸν τε κλήτορα καὶ τὸν συμποσίαρχον. ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν αὐτῷ τῆς πολιτείας ἦδε. (65) πάλιν δ' Ἄκρωνος τοῦ ἱατροῦ τόπον αἰτοῦντος παρὰ τῆς βουλῆς εἰς κατασκευὴν πατρῴου μνήματος διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἱατροῖς ἀκρότητα παρελθὼν δ' Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἐκώλυσε, τὰ τ' ἄλλα περὶ ἰσότητος διαλεχθεὶς καὶ τι καὶ τοιοῦτον ἐρωτήσας· τί δ' ἐπιγράφομεν ἐλεγείον; ἢ τοῦτο;

ἄκρον ἱατρὸν Ἄκρων Ἄκραγαντῖνον πατρὸς Ἄκρου
κρύπτει κρημνὸς ἄκρος πατρίδος ἀκροτάτης; ...'

Timaeian material about Pythagoras and his followers. Surprisingly, Chitwood (2004) 30–1 defines Timaeus as 'a historian and compiler generally hostile to philosophers and therefore generally unreliable', and claims that 'Timaeus' hostility toward philosophers does not strengthen the anecdote's credibility and intent and ... seriously weakens the notion that Empedocles had a political career at all'.

(66) ὕστερον δ' ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ τὸ τῶν χιλίων ἄθροισμα κατέλυσε συνεστὸς ἐπὶ ἔτη τρία, ὥστε οὐ μόνον ἦν τῶν πλουσίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν τὰ δημοτικὰ φρονούντων.

Aristotle also says that Empedocles was a free man and foreign to any political position, since he refused the kingship when it was offered to him, as Xanthus says in the passages about him, evidently because he preferred a simple life. (64) Timaeus says the same thing and at the same time adds the reason why he was a man of the people. For he says that when he was invited to dinner by one of the magistrates and the dinner had gone on for a while, but no wine had been brought in, the others remained silent, but he, moved by his hatred of wickedness, ordered that it be brought in; but the host said that they were waiting for the assistant of the Council. When he arrived, he was made symposiarch, evidently because this had been decided by the host, who was sketching out the beginning of a tyranny; for he ordered them either to drink the wine or to pour it over their heads. At the time Empedocles remained silent; but the next day he brought both men to court, the host and the symposiarch, and had them condemned and executed. And this was the beginning of his involvement in politics. (65) And again, when Acron the doctor asked the Council for a place in order to erect a monument for his father because of his eminence among doctors, Empedocles spoke up and prevented him, saying various things about equality and asking a question like this: ‘What inscription in elegiac verse shall we place on it? This?’

Acron, son of Acron, the eminent doctor of Agrigentum,
lies under the eminent peak of his most eminent fatherland ...’

(66) Later Empedocles dissolved the assembly of the Thousand, which had been established for three years, so that he belonged not only to the wealthy people but also to those who favoured the common people.¹³

To better focus on the overall scope of Timaeus’ anecdote, it is necessary to first consider the two quotations in Diogenes’ account that precede this one.

2.1 By Way of Preamble: Aristotle and Xanthus

Before describing the beginning of Empedocles’ involvement in the life of Acragas, Diogenes presents Aristotle’s and Xanthus’ accounts as in line with what will emerge from the following anecdote. In Aristotle’s authoritative opinion, Empedocles was *ἐλεύθερος* and *πάσης ἀρχῆς ἀλλότριος*. The exact meaning of this phrase is debatable since the sentence appears in all likelihood

¹³ Diog. Laert. 8.63–5 (ed. Dorandi) = P 19 L–M (trans. Laks–Most, adapted).

to have been taken out of its original context. Indeed, Aristotle's usage of *ἐλεύθερος* and its cognates, especially in the *Politics*, shows that they can encompass more than one meaning. Although *ἐλευθερία* denotes a basic characteristic of democratic rule (as in the famous passage *Pol.* 1317a40–b17), it also points to the general distinction between slave and free man, to the citizen of a polis that is not subjected to a despotic/oligarchic regime, and, ultimately, also to the philosopher who devotes his entire life to leisure and contemplation (cf. *Pol.* 1325a18–34). Since it is uncertain whether Diogenes Laertius reflects Aristotle's own words, it is not easy to choose the right translation.¹⁴ The best solution would be 'free man', as opposed to the slave owned by a tyrant or a master—this is, in fact, the meaning of the term when Aristotle uses it approvingly.¹⁵ Aristotle also says that he was *πάσης ἀρχῆς ἀλλότριος*, another expression that is far from transparent. The available options are 'adverse to any political power' and 'foreign to any experience of power'.¹⁶

The subsequent text, however, dispels any doubt about what Diogenes thought Aristotle really meant. Immediately afterwards, Diogenes cites a piece of information found in Xanthus, who is usually identified as the mid-fifth century author of *Lydiaka* (*FGrHist* 765 F 33).¹⁷ According to most scholars, Xanthus treated Empedocles extensively in a section of this work (*ἐν τοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ*), and not in a separate one entirely devoted to him.¹⁸ Xanthus writes that Empedocles did not accept a *βασιλεία* when it was offered to him, because, as Diogenes comments,¹⁹ he loved a simple lifestyle (*λιτότης*).²⁰

¹⁴ Horky (2016) 41 and n. 12 makes a good point in stating that it is not probable that the word comes from Diogenes, who used it rarely and only in connection with the Stoics. However, it is not possible to tell where and how Diogenes consulted Aristotle.

¹⁵ As shown by Hansen (2010) 27.

¹⁶ For the former option, see Laks and Most (2016) and Mensch (2018) 422 (cf. Horky's 'estranged from every sort of rule'), for the latter Kingsley (1995b) 185.

¹⁷ On Xanthus and problems related to the transmission of his text, see Paradiso (2018) and Gazzano (2009).

¹⁸ Kingsley (1995b) 181, *BNJ* (Paradiso) ad loc., whereas Momigliano (1993) 31 is more optimistic about the existence of an Empedoclean biography written by Xanthus.

¹⁹ It cannot be considered certain that this explanation of Empedocles' behaviour comes from Diogenes. Some scholars see this as a comment by the intermediate source in which Diogenes read Xanthus' opinion (Schepens and Theys (1998) 32–3); others refer it to Aristotle (Paradiso (2018) ad loc.), but this is rather unlikely. The repeated use of the adverb *δηλονότι* (§63, 64, 72) points to a consequence inferable from the narrated facts and can be ascribed to Diogenes or to his intermediate source.

²⁰ Cf. Musti (1989) 47. Asheri (1990) 105 dismissed Xanthus' piece as the product of a late hagiographic construction. Horky (2016) 50–4 suggests considering it in the light of other Hellenistic accounts about Pythagoras and his way of life, an option that deserves serious consideration.

Xanthus' assertion should lend further credibility to Aristotle's point, i.e., Empedocles was not interested in political power: he thus refers to a specific episode as evidence in this respect. In addition, the information provided is relevant to understanding Timaeus' anecdote: preferring frugality over luxury (not mentioned, but necessarily implied by *λιτότης*) bears political consequences, since the latter notion is closely associated with tyrannical opulence.²¹

By contrast, Horky sees *πάσης ἀρχῆς ἀλλότριος* as further explaining the previous definition of *ἐλεύθερος* and pointing to Empedocles' hostility towards any kind of rule.²² In his opinion, Aristotle regarded Empedocles as a 'democratic anarchist', who did not participate actively in civil society and refused to obey authority, whereas Timaeus' anecdote aims to directly invalidate this interpretation. Considering Aristotle's well-known views on political participation as a primary disposition of human beings, his portrait of Empedocles is not at all an approving one, says Horky, and Timaeus must have quoted it to refute it. However, there are no textual elements marking the opposition between Aristotle's and the others' views on Empedocles' political convictions.²³ Diogenes presents Aristotle's, Xanthus', and Timaeus' accounts in continuity: each writer adds a piece to the story. Consequently, Horky's assertion that 'Diogenes Laertius has preserved an important internal cover-text which presents the early Hellenistic Timaeus of Tauromenium's dialectal appropriation and criticism of Aristotle's description of Empedocles' character in his lost *On Poets*²⁴ is not rooted in the text. Moreover, when Diogenes reports polemic between authorities, he usually makes this explicit, as happens, for example, when Timaeus explicitly takes issue with Heraclides' claim that Empedocles had died in Sicily (Diog. Laert. 8.71).²⁵

Hence, Diogenes sketches the notion of Empedocles as a political figure, which he then follows up on by recording Timaeus' story of how Empedocles

²¹ Corcella (1999) 182 has intriguingly suggested emending *λιτότητα* to *ισότητα*, whereas BNJ (Paradiso) ad loc. thinks that Empedocles, a member of Acragas' aristocracy, would hardly have led a 'simple' life and, accordingly, translates *λιτότητα* as 'private life'. Yet these solutions would not make Empedocles' aversion to tyranny and to its hallmark, *τροφή*, understandable, as detailed in the following paragraphs of the biography (cf. §2.3). For the conceptual opposition between *λιτότης* and *τροφή*, see Musti (2005) 180.

²² Horky (2016) 37–48.

²³ As for Horky's engagement with Aristotelian texts, it might be relevant to highlight that his discussion of *Pol.* 1317a40–b17 at 42–3, a central text to come to grips with Aristotle's views on anarchy, does not provide evidence for his argumentation. Indeed, here Aristotle reports how democrats conceived *ἐλευθερία*: he presents their view, and not his own (cf. Hansen (2010) 13). And, what is more important, this passage, where none of these ambiguous terms recur, does not offer any useful clue to translate the expression *πάσης ἀρχῆς ἀλλότριον* (*Pol.* 1317a40–b17 reads *ἐντεῦθεν δ' ἐλήλυθε τὸ μὴ ἄρχεσθαι*).

²⁴ Horky (2016) 67.

²⁵ On the scope of Timaeus' criticism, cf. Lapini (2003) 98–9.

publicly displayed his political inclinations. Empedocles' alleged refusal of *βασιλεία* mentioned by Xanthus is in line with Aristotle's judgement and serves as a jumping-off point to further characterise Empedocles' political identity. As will be argued in the following section, his love of *λιτότης* thereby comes from his hostility to tyranny.

2.2 To Drink or to Die

Before analysing Timaeus' obscure story, some *caveats* are in order. Even though Timaeus' views are clear from the content of this passage, this may not be a word-for-word quotation and Diogenes may have reported the story in his own words ([Τίμαιος] φησὶ γὰρ ὅτι ...).²⁶ Moreover, Diogenes is unlikely to have had first-hand access to Timaeus' work but probably consulted it via intermediary sources.²⁷ Yet, there can be some genuine traces of Timaeus' pen: for instance, Asheri claims that the expression *ὑπηρέτης τῆς βουλῆς*, 'assistant of the council',²⁸ comes from an Athenian environment, the one in which we know that Timaeus wrote.²⁹ However, the term *ὑπηρέτης* also recurs in Greek historiography dealing with Rome and its senate (e.g., in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, Herodian, Cassius Dio), where it means 'assistant'.³⁰ Consequently, it is not safe to claim that the use of *ὑπηρέτης* indicates that the anecdote was intended for an Athenian audience: it is true that the surviving evidence has *ὑπηρέται* in the Athenian *boulē*, but the loss of documents relative to other councils makes the assumption unsure. What can be safely said is that a *ὑπηρέτης* was a middle-rank functionary who executed the

²⁶ The phrase *φησὶ γὰρ* normally introduces a citation close to the original words, but it is not possible to double-check its function in Diogenes, since only one occurrence out of nine is from a preserved author. In this isolated case, Diogenes (3.36) cites a piece of information from Plato's *Phaedo* (59c–d), according to which Aristippus was in Aegina when Socrates died. The citation here is too short to draw any conclusion, yet Diogenes says that in this passage Plato is disparaging Aristippus (*διαβάλλων αὐτόν*), an attitude not inferable from the original passage.

²⁷ On this point, see Centrone (1992) 4186–7.

²⁸ Bidez (1894) 126, De Waehle (1971) 170, Champion (2010) ad loc., and Hobden (2013) 119 translate 'servant'. Baron (2013) 167 n. 96 argues against this translation, making a point similar to Asheri (at Athens the term indicates a 'petty officer'; cf. *IG XII.879* mentioned in LSJ), but arguing that he has to be an individual of some relevance. The translation 'servant' does not match what we know from Hellenistic and Roman documents: see Strassi (1997) 22–4. Nothing can be said about the use of the term in Acragas.

²⁹ Asheri (1990) 103. On this point he draws on Rhodes (1972) 141–2, who mentions them among the 'humbler officials' of the *boulē*.

³⁰ For instance, Appian in *Mithr.* 431 mentions *ὑπηρέται δ' ἀπὸ τῆς βουλῆς* (Goukowsky's (2001) translation: 'lieutenants issus du Sénat', so middle-rank officers). The same office is known from Roman Egyptian papyri: see Strassi (1997) 55–6.

orders that he received (cf. Latin *minister*), and, consequently, that he would not have been a leading citizen.³¹

Very difficult to determine is the precise scope of the expression *δημοτικὸν ἄνδρα* at the beginning. The banquet episode and its contextualisation, however, decisively contribute to the choice of one meaning over the other. Modern translators usually opt for the sense of ‘democrat’, but the words can also mean ‘man of the people’.³² The adjective is especially employed with this meaning by Plutarch, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Diodorus Siculus, but a good number of occurrences are also already found in Attic oratory. The problem arises from its having two possible meanings, which are not the same in this context: since a *δημοτικός* belongs to the *δῆμος*, the word, when applied to individuals, can mean ‘on the popular/democratic side’, but also ‘generous, philanthropic’, standing by the side of their people but without particular political connotations (cf. LSJ). Interestingly, the same label of *δημοτικός* was applied to Solon’s legislation in two passages of the *Constitution of the Athenians* ascribed to Aristotle (9.1, 10.1), when speaking of the three most democratic features of his dispensation.³³ Even if in these passages the sense of *δημοτικός* is that of democrat *tout court*, it is also self-evident that such democratic features were integrated into the constitution to reach a balance with the pre-existing aristocratic system. Eventually, the result of his reforms was that each party was left dissatisfied ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 13).³⁴

The scene of the alleged crime is that of an extravagant symposium held by the magistrates of the city. Despite being so funny as to make one think that it came from a comic piece, it is rather implausible to maintain that its aim

³¹ Strassi (1997) 1–10. The etymology of the name points to ‘under-rowers’, who then ‘began to acquire a figurative sense, to symbolize immediate and inevitable response to orders’ (Richardson (1943) 58).

³² For the former, see Laks and Most (2016) ‘democratic tendency’, Gigante (1962) ‘democratico’, Grau I Guijarro (2009) 336 ‘demòcrata’, Mensch (2018) ‘democratic spirit’; for the latter, Horky (2016) and Apelt (1967) ‘[die Ursache] der Popularität des Mannes’. Cf. also Robinson (2011) 93 ‘populist’.

³³ These *δημοτικώτατα/δημοτικά* mentioned at §9 are: ‘that loans should not be on the security of the person; next, the possibility for whoever wished to obtain vengeance for those who were wronged; and thirdly, the point by which they say the masses were strengthened most, appeal to the law court: for when the *demos* has power over the vote it has power over the political regime’ (trans. P. J. Rhodes).

³⁴ See Rhodes (1981) 179–80. Also Plutarch’s treatment in Solon’s biography is relevant in this respect. Scholars like Ferreira (2008) and Pelling (2011) have highlighted how the term *δημοτικός* in Plutarch not only means ‘democrat’ proper (like *δημοκρατικόν*), but is also associated with a notion of philanthropy: it has more to do with the moral description of the person than with the ideology that inspires his political actions.

was that of making people laugh.³⁵ During the feast, the wine was not served until the assistant of the Council arrived and was nominated as master of the symposium (*συμποσίταρχος*), evidently because, as Diogenes adds, this was the will of the host. The appointment as leader of the banquet is the first suspicious act, not so much with regard to the individual himself, whose job was that of executing his chief's orders, but because of the procedure of the election itself. Usually, the symposiarch was elected by his fellow participants, who took into consideration his abilities both to entertain and to maintain order.³⁶ In this case, he must have been appointed beforehand, since everyone waited for him to start drinking. The exceptional nature of Empedocles' attitude is visible from the beginning: while the others remained silent when wine was not brought in, he nonetheless tried to keep the banquet's schedule on track and himself ordered to have the wine served. But his authority was not taken into consideration. From this moment onwards, it was evident that the hosts wanted to rule the symposium just as tyrants would have done.³⁷

The move that made the hosts' true intentions even clearer to Empedocles—and to the law court the day after—is the bizarre instruction that follows: to either drink wine or pour it over their heads.³⁸ This was not only an eccentric way to press home the point that the magistrates were not acting with propriety at the feast. Their threat was rightly interpreted by Empedocles, and by the court that found them guilty, as pointing to a political revolution. A passage from Trimalchio's notorious dinner party in Petronius' *Satyricon* looks very much like the episode in Timaeus. In this scene slaves, who refuse to drink wine themselves, will have it poured over their heads as well:

³⁵ Brown (1958) 52 writes that 'the extravagance of the punishment and the generally boisterous behaviour of the leading persons suggest that Timaeus has been reading some pasquinade'; Chitwood (2004) 31 'his actions are ridiculous and again speak of his exaggerated sense of self-worth'; Hobden (2013) 121 speaks of 'extreme reaction to sympotic frivolity' and 'churlish overreaction'. By contrast, Pearson (1987) 127 thinks that it is unlikely that the two men were sentenced without any proof.

³⁶ On the procedure for electing a symposiarch, the most thorough ancient account is Plut. *Mor.* 620A–22B. Cf. also O'Connor (2015) 101–14 with a selection of ancient passages.

³⁷ Yet not all tyrants were rude and arrogant party-givers. On the contrary, Pindar's descriptions of the symposia attest that Hieron and Chromius used to behave affably to their fellow symposiasts to further improve their image of being good-natured hosts. They did so because, according to the majority of scholars, symposium and egalitarianism go side-by-side: within the sympotic space, all members are equal and free, yet they need to enter into common rules shared with their fellow guests (Athanasaki (2009) 259–66; Morgan (2015) 209–59). Likewise, in order to be effective, sympotic equality also necessarily entails moderation, self-discipline, and continence; otherwise excessive drunkenness can lead to improper behaviour towards companions and, to some extent, also towards the society at large (see the above-mentioned *FGrHist* 566 F 149).

³⁸ The Greek text marks (with *γάρ*) that this request is evidence of the host's true intentions.

repressus ergo aliquamdiu Trimalchio camellam grandem iussit misceri <et> potiones diuidi omnibus seruis, qui ad pedes sedebant, adiecta exceptione ‘si quis’ inquit ‘noluerit accipere, caput illi perfunde. Interdiu seuera, nunc hilaria.’

After some time, Trimalchio calmed himself, and ordered a great bowl of wine to be mixed, and drinks to be served round to all the slaves, who were sitting at our feet, adding this provision: ‘If anyone refuses to take it, pour it over his head; business in the daytime and pleasure at night.’³⁹

Trimalchio, the *nouveau riche* par excellence of ancient literature, probably just wanted to have fun at his party (*interdiu seuera, nunc hilaria*), and he was aware that he could do whatever he wished with his own slaves. He was, in short, their tyrant.⁴⁰ Empedocles, in Diogenes’ story at least, had therefore lucidly foreseen what would have happened.⁴¹ Moreover, no one should have been surprised to see that the organisers were convicted, since they treated the free citizens of Acragas as if they were their own slaves, and they did so in a politically meaningful setting, that of the symposium.⁴² As Hobden writes, ‘disruptions to the sympotic order anticipate disruption to the present political

³⁹ Petr. *Sat.* 64 (ed. Müller; trans. Heseltine and Rouse).

⁴⁰ Herodotus (4.62) claims that the Scythians used to sacrifice one out of every hundred prisoners, and before they slew them, they poured wine over their heads. In this case, pouring wine might be some sort of purification, as it used to be in Rome before the immolation of a victim (Horster (2007) 334), but also as a prelude to the blood that is going to flow after the slaying. In ancient Assyria, a libation of wine could be poured over the head of a dead enemy—see the case of the defeat of Te-Umman by Ashurbanipal, who poured wine on his beheaded enemy (Bonatz (2004) 96).

⁴¹ In this case, Empedocles is not affected by anxiety or excessive emotion; rather he shows presence of mind. This characterisation of Empedocles clashes with that of a melancholic Empedocles, which emerges from the *Problemata Physica* ascribed to Aristotle (30.1). Individuals affected by melancholia swing from euphoria to depression, and this condition has possibly informed the traditions about Empedocles’ suicide (Lapini (2003) 109–14).

⁴² It is odd that Empedocles, and not a jury, condemned the two hosts: he allegedly sent them to death (ἀπέκτεινε) thanks to his testimony, but how he could have managed to have the final word is difficult to infer, especially since we are told that at this point in the story he did not play a political role of any kind. Therefore, it is best to assume that καταδικάσας simply has a causative meaning here (‘have them condemned and executed’). By contrast, Robinson (2011) 93 finds that ‘the use of the *dikasterion* for launching a political career, the nature of the charge, the severity of the punishment are all redolent of democratic political trials’. He further argues that Empedocles’ association with rhetoric points at his being a demagogue (92–5). However, this felony takes place at a symposium, where arguably only upper-class citizens were invited and it reveals the existence of tension among aristocrats.

order'.⁴³ Other stories featuring bizarre symposia can be mentioned by way of comparison to show that the violation of the sympotic code, which prescribes moderation (*μετριότης*) above all, has repercussions for the public sphere too.⁴⁴

To return to the possible meaning of *δημοτικὸν ἄνδρα* in the opening, it has become clear that Empedocles here hardly acted on behalf of the interests of democracy in a narrow sense. This sympotic occasion was meant to be attended by the elite of the city only. What he did was detect before his peers that the magistrates were scheming against the city to (re-) establish a tyranny. For this reason, he could be regarded as a political leader who showed understanding and sympathy for the concerns of the whole community, a 'champion of the people'. Moreover, Empedocles decides to take action when wine is not served because of his 'hatred of wickedness' (*μισοπονήρως διατιθείς*). He is not simply a champion of good manners, but rather a champion of good versus evil.⁴⁵ This would not automatically entail that he actually supported the democratic cause. That Empedocles shows sympathy for the concerns and needs of ordinary people, standing against tyranny and (very likely) against oligarchy, is Timaeus' and arguably Diogenes' vision. Yet one can doubt that the common people would have unanimously regarded Empedocles as their champion, since tyrants usually looked for a popular consensus to defeat the upper class 'elite'.⁴⁶

Timaeus was no stranger to telling detailed and scandalous stories about luxury, *τρυφή*, which he morally condemned, and which he probably already connected with *ὑβρις* and the punishment it typically attracted.⁴⁷ The notion of *τρυφή* included, in addition to luxury, also immoderate feasting, indolence, and sexual depravity. Despite the fact that the term is not consistently attested before the late Hellenistic Age, a moralising Timaeus can be detected behind

⁴³ Hobden (2013) 121. Grau I Guijarro (2009) 336 comes to a similar conclusion.

⁴⁴ See Timaeus (*FGHist* 566 F 149), about a happy party of young fellows, who were so drunk that they thought they were on a trireme sailing in stormy seas. But scenes of fifth-century eccentric symposia are also common in mainland Greece: suffice it to mention the famous tale of the wedding of Agariste and the performance contest among her suitors (Hdt. 6.126–30). Here Hippoclides, when his turn came at a dinner party to win the girl's hand, rebelled against the tyrannical rule of her father, Cleisthenes, and danced on the table, standing on his head and 'moving his legs in the air as if they were arms' (6.129.4).

⁴⁵ Furthermore, this definition might point to his indignation in attending a drinking party where former non-elite individuals were invited as well (cf. the case of Tellias discussed below, §2.4).

⁴⁶ See Braccisi (1998) VII–XI, who provides an overview of Sicilian tyranny and its distinctive features, in opposition to mainland Greece. An astute interpretation of the socio-economic dynamics running among aristocrats, tyrants, and the middle class is given in Rose (2012) esp. 201–66.

⁴⁷ As persuasively shown by Hau (2016) 129–36. See, e.g., FF 26a, 48, 50, 100a–c, 111, 116, 119a–c, 121, 122, 124b–d, 148, 158a–b, and, of course, 134.

the authors who cite him (mainly Diodorus and Athenaeus).⁴⁸ After all, one of the hallmark features of tyranny was indeed luxury, a feature of the Acragantines to which Empedocles alludes: ‘the Acragantines live in luxury as though they were going to die tomorrow, but they build their houses as though they were going to live forever’ (Ἀκραγαντῖνοι τρυφῶσι μὲν ὡς αὔριον ἀποθανούμενοι, οἰκίας δὲ κατασκευάζονται ὡς πάντα τὸν χρόνον βιωσόμενοι, Diog. Laert. 8.63 = P 27 L–M, trans. Laks and Most). Empedocles’ criticism of τρυφή chimes with the alleged motivation for his refusal of kingship, namely his preference for a simple lifestyle, λιτότης (§1.1).

2.3 Further Political Experiences on the Side of the People

We have seen, then, that Empedocles warded off a potential new tyrant, not or not only in order to please the people of Acragas, but mainly to protect his own interests and those of his peers. Arguably, in ‘the drink-or-die’ anecdote Empedocles plays the role of the guardian of political equality. Also the excerpts Diogenes quotes immediately afterwards focus on the same point (8.65).⁴⁹ Even though not much is known about the Sicilian political institutions of this time, the rationale behind Empedocles’ alleged actions turns out to be that of a fight against extravagant honours, while promoting values such as ἰσότης and ὁμόνοια.⁵⁰ The dismissal of the Council of the Thousand,

⁴⁸ Hau (2016) 125–8 has rightly taken issue with Gorman and Gorman (2007), who attributed to Athenaeus the moral-didactic agenda behind such tales of immoderate living.

⁴⁹ Jacoby did not include the story about Acron’s father in the text of F 134. Horky (2016) 59 n. 91 suggests that these passages might come from Neanthes since they again stress Empedocles’ commitment to equality in politics (cf. the passages quoted below). By contrast, the dismissal of the Council of the Thousand is part of *FGrHist* 566 F 2, and Horky (2016) mentions his decision approvingly. For my part, I do not believe that this whole passage comes from Timaeus. In Diogenes’ view, it is in line with what Timaeus said, but the Sicilian historian is not cited as the source of the information. *Contra*, Baron (2013) 167, who finds that Diogenes is here citing Timaeus. But the following sentence starting with ὁ γέ τοι Τίμαιος (text quoted below, §2.5) highlights that Timaeus’ contribution is what follows. For the employment of the particle γε in Postclassical Greek and its value as a particle of scope focusing attention on the concept that follows, see Humbert (1960) 396–7 and Denniston (1954) 114–62.

⁵⁰ This concern is especially true for the Assembly of the Thousand: see remarks in Asheri (1990) 106–7, Ghinatti (1996) 29–39, Palumbo (2008) 135–6, Horky (2016) 60–1, and De Angelis (2016) 211. Diogenes’ estimate of 800,000 inhabitants for Empedocles’ time is of course an exaggeration. De Angelis (2016) 196–7, on the basis of Diod. Sic. 13.84.3, where it is claimed that in 406 BCE Acragas had a population of 200,000 people (of whom only 20,000 were full citizens), estimates the total population at around 30,000–40,000 inhabitants. Accordingly, the Council of the Thousand, whose political aim remains controversial, would actually point to ‘the few’, and not ‘the many’. Giangiulio (2018), in contrast, has proposed to interpret these councils/oligarchies of fixed number as pointing to ‘the many’, but he does not take into consideration the case of Acragas.

according to Diogenes and/or his middle source, is evidence of Empedocles having at heart his people's interests while still being one of the aristocrats (οὐ μόνον ἦν τῶν πλουσίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν τὰ δημοτικὰ φρονούντων). For instance, in the case of the Assembly of the Thousand, it is difficult to assess what this action entailed, since we know so little about the nature of this council; it was probably some sort of restricted congregation. Yet, this passage suspiciously resembles what happened in Croton after Pythagoras' death: the Pythagoreans Hippasus, Diodorus, and Theages wanted to abolish the ancestral constitution in favour of a democracy and dissolved a Council of the Thousand.⁵¹ Whether this account has something to do with Timaeus is highly debated.⁵² Be that as it may, Pythagorean involvement in the political life of Croton is much more clearly attested than is any connection with Empedocles, and perhaps it is not unlikely that Timaeus, or whoever the source was, might have shaped this piece of information about Sicily on the basis of the history of Southern Italy.⁵³

Another excerpt quoted by Diogenes soon afterwards, this time derived from Neanthes of Cyzicus,⁵⁴ stresses that Empedocles' intervention was, once again, in favour of *ἰσότης*, and shows him being on guard against *στάσεις*, 'political dissensions', even more strongly (*FGrHist* 84 F 28):

Νεάνθης δ' ὁ Κυζικηνὸς ὁ καὶ περὶ τῶν Πυθαγορικῶν εἰπὼν φησι Μέτωνος τελευτήσαντος τυραννίδος ἀρχὴν ὑποφύεσθαι· εἶτα τὸν Ἐμπεδοκλέα πείσαι τοὺς Ἀκραγαντίνους παύσασθαι μὲν τῶν στάσεων, ἰσότητα δὲ πολιτικὴν ἀσκεῖν.

Neanthes of Cyzicus, who also wrote about the Pythagoreans, says that after the death of Meton a tyranny was gradually beginning to develop, but that then Empedocles persuaded the Agrigentines to put an end to their dissensions and to practise political equality.⁵⁵

Here, as well as in the 'drink-or-die' anecdote, Empedocles acted promptly, when tyranny was just about to rise (*τυραννίδος ἀρχὴν* again). Plutarch (*Adv. Col.* 1126B) confirms all these claims, when he says that Empedocles convicted

⁵¹ The story is told in the work *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* by Iamblichus (257–8), who claims to derive it from a certain Apollonius (254–64).

⁵² Horkey (2013) 111–14 defends this attribution, *contra*, Baron (2013) 138–64.

⁵³ See Rowett (2014) and Musti (2005) 103–203 for an argumentative overview, which links the notion of *Megale Hellas* to the rise of the Pythagorean myth.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of Neanthes as a biographer, see Schorn (2007), esp. 128–32 on the evidence about Empedocles.

⁵⁵ Diog. Laert. 8.72 = P 18 L–M (trans. Laks–Most, adapted).

the most prominent citizens of Acragas who were guilty of ὑβρις and who plundered the city's finances.

Even if his efforts cannot be labelled as democratic in a narrow sense, nevertheless he is portrayed as firmly seeking to resolve political unrest involving the risk of a new tyranny. This conclusion also ties in better with the historical backdrop of that time, as will be argued in the next section.

2.4 Tyrants, Aristocrats, and the 'Middle Class' in Fifth-Century Acragas

Despite Timaeus' taste for narration, the 'drink-or-die anecdote' tells us something about the socio-political situation of the city: below a fictional layer lies a historical background, which agrees with the one that emerges from other sources.⁵⁶ In ancient sources, Acragas' political history between 472 and 406 BCE is described as having been tumultuous, oscillating between periods of mild democracy and turbulence. According to Diodorus Siculus (11.53.5), who is likely to be drawing on Timaeus for this section,⁵⁷ the Acragantines were the first people in Sicily to regain their freedom after Theron's seizure of power in 472/1 BCE. This event occurred quite by chance. Thrasydaeus, Theron's son, embarked on a risky and unmotivated war against Syracuse. After his defeat, the population rebelled against its tyrant, who distinguished himself for his cruelty, and they succeeded in restoring a δημοκρατία once more. This was not a democracy in the Athenian sense, however, but simply not a tyranny.⁵⁸ Diodorus (11.76.4) also says that, after the fall of the tyranny, the exiled aristocrats eventually managed to come back home and regain their possessions, which had been confiscated.⁵⁹ Such recovery of previously owned

⁵⁶ My discussion in this section owes a lot to Asheri (1990) 101–3, Berger (1992) 17, Braccesi (1998) 59–60, De Miro (1998) 338–9.

⁵⁷ Modern scholarship on Diodorus written in the last two centuries has focused especially on a *Quellenforschung* approach, consequently regarding him as a mere compiler. However, the ground-breaking monograph by Sacks (1990) breathed new life into the scholarship on the subject, arguing in favour of the originality of Diodorus' work. Since then, scholars have divided themselves into two parties, one following Sacks' intuitions and claiming Diodorus' independence, the other reacting to this trend and embracing again the *Quellenforschung* approach in a more nuanced way than in the past. This debate is discussed in detail in Hau–Meeus–Sheridan (2018) 1–9.

⁵⁸ *Contra*, Robinson (2011) 92–5, who, on the basis of Diodorus' account of Syracuse, finds the institution of a democratic regime seems more likely. One of his arguments to prove that Acragas did enjoy a democratic organisation is the employment of ψήφισμα in Diod. Sic. 13.84.5. However, this might not be relevant for the immediate period after the tyranny (the information is cited for 406 BCE). Cf. Braccesi (1998) 59–60.

⁵⁹ It might be tempting here to see a reference to Empedocles' alleged exile, as described in Diog. Laert. 8.67 (the descendants of his enemies prevented him from coming back to Acragas), a tradition possibly stemming from B 112 D–K = D 4 L–M and his address to his

properties was possible because the aristocracy did not allow a redistribution of land, which, on the contrary, used to be a standard procedure in ancient Sicily following the end of the tyranny. Moreover, the reintegration of the exiled sympathisers of the democrats did not occur until 461/0, when Diodorus (11.76.4) speaks of the exiled group of Hieron's time (not of Theron's or Thrasydaeus'). Even if the episode of Empedocles dismissing the Council of the Thousand after three years (Diog. Laert. 8.65: cf. above, §2.3) is considered historically trustworthy, there would be room to speculate that, after Thrasydaeus' defeat, for some time Hieron was in control of Acragas' political affairs from Syracuse and established some kind of oligarchy, which Empedocles eventually helped remove.⁶⁰

Within this historical framework, symposia used to play a crucial role, since they were typically viewed as an occasion to display personal wealth.⁶¹ When society sees the rise of new economic forces, non-elite people can acquire lasting wealth, for example, through wholesale trade. That is likely to have been the case in late fifth-century Acragas: compelling is the story of Tellias, the richest man in the city, who used to have a crowd of servants before his gates inviting every stranger to be his guest (Diod. Sic. 13.83.1). Diodorus' source here is possibly Timaeus, who is explicitly named a few lines afterwards, when Tellias is said to have entertained five hundred soldiers who had arrived from Gela after a storm (*FGrHist* 566 F 26a). Diodorus adds that he was not the only one doing so, and, for this reason, Empedocles defined his friends in Acragas as 'havens of mercy for strangers' (B 112.4 D–K = D 4.3 L–M).⁶²

friends in Acragas as if he was talking from a distance, a thesis endorsed, for instance, by Zuntz (1971) 198.

⁶⁰ The possibility of anchoring Empedocles within this landscape is, however, only conjectural. Apollodorus of Athens (Diog. Laert. 8.52, 74) places his *floruit* when Thurii was founded (444/3 BCE). Therefore, Empedocles must have lived between 484/3 and 424/3, a reconstruction which may affect the credibility of his involvement in the political life of Acragas around 472/1, when the tyranny ended (Laks and Most (2016) 317). But Aristotle's claim (*Met.* 984a11 = P 4 L–M) that he was not that much younger than Anaxagoras and Empedocles' recurring connection in ancient sources with the Eleatics suggest that he lived ca. 494–434. See discussion in Wright (1981) 3–6. De Waehle (1971) 169–71 offers a convincing chronological reconstruction of the facts collected by Diogenes Laertius, while Inwood (2001) 6–8 is highly sceptical about finding the truth behind the claims of the testimonies. Berger (1992) 17 finds the testimonies on Empedocles' involvement in politics to be doubtful, since he would have been too young on the basis of Diog. Laert. 8.66, a passage where, however, there are no references to Empedocles' chronology.

⁶¹ Pace Corner (2010), and his interpretation of the symposium as 'a concrete instantiation of middling civic community' (355), I maintain the symposium to be an aristocratic banquet: see Murray (1990) 6–7, with further refinements by Schmitt Pantel (1992) 32–48, and Węcowski (2014), who has criticised the notion of an early Greek hereditary aristocracy.

⁶² In another episode told by Diodorus, Tellias, sent on an embassy to the people of Centoripa, proved not to be a brilliant speaker, and the Assembly broke into laughter, since

Tellias' extravagance, says Diodorus, was not isolated: similarly, Antisthenes gave a marriage party for his daughter, which distinguished itself by offering incredible provision for lighting (13.84.1–2). These events are placed by Diodorus, after Timaeus, in the year 406 BCE. In addition, pottery evidence datable to the time range 480–420 and employed in symposia is also a valuable historical source. Here one need only think of the famous and beautiful red-figured *kantharos* from Acragas of ca. 470 BCE representing Sappho and Alcaeus.⁶³

The anecdote under discussion, therefore, regardless of its real historical value, should be read against this political climate of suspicion and mistrust. To guarantee that a new tyranny would not arise again, fighting against the excesses of luxury and power displayed by some individuals was essential. An oligarchy of a fixed number could have also been potentially dangerous in that regard. Of course, those who engaged in such a fight were aristocrats like Empedocles himself, preventing their own fellow aristocrats, but also individuals like Tellias and Antisthenes, who boastfully displayed wealth, from establishing a tyranny again.

2.5 Timaeus and Autoschediasm?

However, in Empedocles' case biographical accounts do not always dovetail with Timaeus' authoritative portrait: as reported by Diogenes again, some knew that Empedocles was as keen on luxury as his peers were. In view of the prosperity of Acragas as a city, it was also easier to imagine Empedocles as having adopted a lavish material lifestyle and, as far as his temperament is concerned, it was tempting to infer not only that Empedocles had a confident and flamboyant personality, but also that he was keen on royal demeanour. Among these dissenting voices is Favorinus, who depicted Empedocles in sumptuous dress, with long hair, bronze sandals, and purple clothes.⁶⁴ All in all, he looked like a king:

he fell short of what was expected of him. De Angelis (2016) 202 argued with regard to this passage that Tellias' poor performance shows his lack of culture, and, I would add, of political experience, and strengthens the impression that he was a *parvenu*. His reply to the people of Centoripa is relevant and proves his wit: he said that people of Acragas used to send their best men to famous cities (is this an allusion to Empedocles? Cf. B 112 D–K = D 4 L–M), while men like himself were sent to insignificant ones (13.83.4).

⁶³ Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen inv. 2416, on which see Lissarrague (1990) 32–3.

⁶⁴ The purple clothes were indeed prerogatives of aristocracy: Xenophanes (fr. 3 W.) describes the citizens of Colophon going to the *agora* with purple cloaks, and inscriptions testify that, in the archaic period in Acragas, the elites were named 'wearers of purple' (De Angelis (2016) 149, 256). The detail of the bronze sandals recorded here by Favorinus is not isolated in ancient biographies. See the interpretation by Kingsley (1995a) 237–8 and 250–1, who has explained it in the light of magical rituals that biographers misinterpreted or deliberately omitted.

ἔτι τε πολλὰς τῶν πολιτίδων ἀπρόϊκους ὑπαρχούσας αὐτὸν προικίσαι διὰ τὸν παρόντα πλοῦτον· διὸ δὴ πορφύραν τε ἀναλαβεῖν αὐτὸν καὶ στρόφιον ἐπιθέσθαι χρυσοῦν, ὡς Φαβωρίνος ἐν Ἀπομνημονεύμασιν· ἔτι τ' ἐμβάτας χαλκᾶς καὶ στέμμα Δελφικόν. κόμη τε ἦν αὐτῷ βαθεῖα· καὶ παῖδες ἀκόλουθοι· καὶ αὐτὸς ἀεὶ σκυθρωπὸς ἐφ' ἐνὸς σχήματος ἦν. τοιοῦτος δὴ προΐει, τῶν πολιτῶν ἐντυχόντων καὶ τοῦτ' ἀξιωσάντων οἴονεὶ βασιλείας τινὸς παράσημον.

Moreover, by reason of his ample wealth he gave a dowry to many girls of his city who did not have one. And this was how he could dress in purple clothes and a gold sash, as Favorinus says in his *Memoirs*, and also wear bronze shoes and a Delphic garland. He had luxuriant hair and a retinue of young attendants; and he was always gloomy and did not change his bearing. This is how he went along; and when his fellow citizens met him they regarded this as though it were a sign of a certain royalty.⁶⁵

The luxury-fighter Empedocles was thus not the one and only option available on the biographical market. Undoubtedly, Favorinus' lines show the influence played by Empedocles' self-presentation in B 112 D–K = D 4 L–M, usually regarded as the proem of *Purifications* or of the single poem, where he goes among his fellow citizens honoured like a god, crowned with ribbons and garlands.

Autoschediasm here was indeed hard to resist, but Timaeus attempted to address the issue when he suggested that in his poetry Empedocles was playing another game—being a champion of the people in his actions despite being arrogant and egocentric in his poetry (Diog. Laert. 8.66 = *FGrHist* 566 F 2):

ὁ γε τοι Τίμαιος ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ καὶ δευτέρᾳ (πολλάκις γὰρ αὐτοῦ μνημονεύει) φησὶν ἐναντίαν ἐσχηκέναι γνώμην αὐτὸν †τῇ τε πολιτείᾳ φαίνεσθαι†, ὅπου γε ἀλάζονα καὶ φίλαυτον ἐν τῇ ποιήσει.⁶⁶

Timaeus says in his first and second books (he often mentions him) that he seems to have acquired the opposite opinion †to the constitution†, at

⁶⁵ Diog. Laert. 8.73 = fr. 50 Barigazzi = P 21 L–M (trans. Laks and Most).

⁶⁶ Although the text is corrupt, Timaeus' point is clear enough. I have cited Dorandi's text. Previous editors tried to restore the passage quite adventurously: φησὶν ἐναντίαν γνώμην ἐσχηκέναι αὐτὸν τῇ πολιτείᾳ φαίνεσθαι· ὅπου δ' ἀλάζονα καὶ φίλαυτον ἐν τῇ ποιήσει [ἴδοι τις ἄν] (Cobet); ... αὐτὸν <ἐν τε> τῇ πολιτείᾳ <καὶ ἐν τῇ ποιήσει· ὅπου μὲν γὰρ μέτριον καὶ ἐπιεικῆ> φαίνεσθαι, ὅπου δὲ ἀλάζονα καὶ φίλαυτον [ἐν τῇ ποιήσει] (Diels); φησὶν ἐναντίαν ἐσχηκέναι γνώμην αὐτὸν <ἐν> τῇ πολιτείᾳ φαίνεσθαι (Marcovich).

least wherever in his poetry [scil. he appears?] as a braggart and narcissist.⁶⁷

Timaeus' programmatic claim, however, does not automatically imply that he developed a fully-fledged criticism of Peripatetic approaches to biography.⁶⁸ On the contrary, Polybius (12.24.1–3 = *FGrHist* 566 F 152) offers evidence for Timaeus' deducing writers' personalities from their works, and, judging from the extant fragments, on (at least) one other occasion the Sicilian historiographer did employ Empedocles' poetry to prove a point of his account.⁶⁹ In rejecting the sensational story about Empedocles committing suicide by jumping into Etna, Timaeus (Diog. Laert. 8.71 = *FGrHist* 566 F 6 = P 29 L–M) affirms that he died in the Peloponnese instead and that he did not even know of the volcano, since he did not mention it in his poetry (*argumentum ex silentio*). Also Timaeus' bold reconstruction, according to which Empedocles met Pythagoras and was a student of his (Diog. Laert. 8.54 = *FGrHist* 566 F 14 = P 10 L–M), was possibly based on the interpretation of B 129 D–K = D 38 L–M, where, according to Timaeus, the man praised was Pythagoras, and not Parmenides, as others alternatively thought (Diog. Laert. 8.54 = P 10 L–M). Therefore, Timaeus' assertion about Empedocles' different attitudes in life and in poetry casts itself as a noticeable exception in his biographical practice, which he felt obliged to justify. One could object that an individual need not practice what s/he preaches: a boaster and narcissist can theoretically play any role in any constitution, and this would not have damaged the credibility of Empedocles' democratic tendencies. But clearly Timaeus did not want to emphasise Empedocles' individualistic characteristics. Drawing directly on Empedocles' own self-presentation would have risked harming the agenda of

⁶⁷ Diog. Laert. 8.66 = *FGrHist* 566 F 2 = P 20 L–M (trans. Laks and Most, adapted).

⁶⁸ As is maintained by Horky (2016) 65–8.

⁶⁹ Polybius did not miss the occasion to blame once more his armchair rival Timaeus, who arguably did not judge a man's character from his actions, but from his writings (12.24.2 = *FGrHist* 566 F 152: *φησὶ γὰρ τοὺς ποιητὰς καὶ συγγραφέας διὰ τῶν ὑπεράνω πλεονασμῶν ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι διαφαίνειν τὰς ἑαυτῶν φύσεις, λέγων τὸν μὲν ποιητὴν ἐκ τοῦ δαιτρεύειν πολλαχοῦ τῆς ποιήσεως, ὡς ἂν εἰ γαστρίμαργον παρεμφαίνειν, τὸν δ' Ἀριστοτέλην, ὀψαρτεύοντα πλεονάκις ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασιν ὀψοφάγον εἶναι καὶ λίχρον* ('for he [sc. Timaeus] says that poets and authors show their real natures in their writings by dwelling excessively on certain matters, maintaining that the poet (sc. Homer) is constantly feasting his heroes, suggesting gluttony, and Aristotle often gives recipes in his writings, suggesting an epicure and gourmand', trans. Champion (2010). Cf. the remarks by Vattuone (1991) 35–9 and Baron (2013) 118–19 on the polemical invective of Timaeus against Aristotle. *Contra*, Horky (2016) 66, who employs F 152 to argue that the Sicilian historiographer subjected Aristotle 'to his own medicine', i.e., inferring an author's character from his writings, precisely to prove how unreliable this biographical practice was.

this anti-tyrannical historiographer and for Timaeus, one of the most prominent intellectual figures of Sicily, his homeland could not have displayed tyrannical inclinations.

Empedocles' poetry apparently did not offer any kind of explicit political hints, which could really be exploited for biographical purposes. And yet, when looking at Empedocles' poetry and philosophical system as a whole, one can detect a meaningful element, which could have informed the image of an Empedocles fighting in the name of political equality, namely the oscillating balance that exists between the harmony characteristic of the age of Sphairos and the discord characteristic of the age of Strife. For example, in B 28 D–K = D 90 L–M, a passage describing Sphairos' eponymous sphericity, the Sphairos is 'equal on every side' (l. 1 πάντοθεν ἴσος). A similar egalitarianism is at work in the like-to-like perception: earth is perceived via earth, water via water, and so on (B 109 D–K = D 207 L–M). Perception is then made possible by the affinity that beings have with the cosmos—we are made of elements, and therefore we can perceive those elements (B 110 D–K = D 257 L–M). But the most striking instance is without doubt B 17 D–K = D 73 L–M (ll. 247–51, 258–60). Here, the roots are said to be of equal age, to have their own peculiar honours, and to rule in turn. Even in those phases where Love or Strife are predominant, the overall impression that one would have of the cosmic cycle is that of a ruling equity: if Harmony were not matched with the counteraction of Strife, there would only be the undifferentiated mixture of the *Sphairos*.⁷⁰ A similar point is made in B 20 D–K = D 73 L–M (ll. 301–8).

Such egalitarianism in physics could have easily become egalitarianism in politics. A 'concealed' political notion is especially compelling with regard to the above-mentioned B 17 D–K = D 73 L–M: if the elements are all equal and of the same age, no one can boast any sort of primogeniture. This idea could well be exploited in a political sense: in monarchic-tyrannical regimes the right of succession belonging to the firstborn child significantly affects the development of political affairs. Moreover, if each of them has a specific honour and they enjoy a successive supremacy, it is tempting to interpret that claim as a reference to the rotation of office at fixed times, one of the principles that lie

⁷⁰ How to read Empedocles' cosmic cycle is still a matter of controversy, and on this specific point unfortunately the Strasbourg Papyrus does not provide relevant evidence. While the majority of scholars assume that the four generative phases of the cycle, as they are described in doxographical accounts, fall into two different zoogonies (as thoroughly argued in O'Brien (1969)), there are also dissenting voices (e.g., Santaniello (2004) and Sedley (2007) 33–52, with divergences between one another), who advocate that the cycle hosts only one world. For an overview of this problem, see the collection of essays in Pierris (2005), which endorse both views. As far as the scope of this paper is concerned, suffice it to say that, whatever view one accepts, equality is always the core notion of the cycle.

at the heart of the democratic system.⁷¹ Such assertions, if valid in physics, could very well be exploited in biographical tradition.

3. Conclusion

Despite the strong individuality and charisma that emerges from his verses, many ancient sources testify that Empedocles resisted tyranny and oligarchy and was on the side of the people. This representation dovetails very nicely with the above-described situation in fifth-century Acragas, when the city was slowly recovering from an earlier era of tyranny and was struggling to prevent someone else from seizing power. Opulence and tyranny used to go hand-in-hand, in both mainland Greece and Sicily. This circumstance explains why Empedocles was supposed to have directed their criticism towards the luxurious habits of their city-fellows in order to prevent them from seizing power: he wanted to preserve the freedom that he and his fellow citizens had regained at long last. All in all, one cannot but agree that ‘it is class-conscious aristocrats who resent, envy and desire tyranny’.⁷² Empedocles knew well how to behave at a symposium, but also in response to the crisis of his city. He was not only a *symposii arbiter*, but, all in all, a *concordiae arbiter*.

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⁷¹ As Vlastos (1947) 160 did. Similar thoughts in Palumbo (2008) 137.

⁷² Rose (2012) 217.

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