

"A Socio-Psychological and Semiotic Analysis of Epicurus' Portrait" by Bernard Frischer

Post by "Don" of January 22, 2023 at 11:09 AM

I haven't read Frischer's book yet. I need to add it to my ever-growing list of books to read.

On hero worship: From my perspective, there's no doubt that Epicurus was "venerated" as (sort of) divine figure. We just have to look to the hymns to Epicurus in Lucretius. That's also part of the whole birthday observations. It wasn't simply "cake and presents" to use a modern metaphor.

The word used in the Will of Epicurus in the "funeral offerings to my father, mother, and brothers" is ἐνάγισμα "enagisma." These were not just performed at the funeral, these were "an offering to the dead" per LSJ. There is also a German Wikipedia article on the practice. Here's a Google Translate version of that article:

[Enagisma - Wikipedia \(de-m-wikipedia-org.translate.goog\)](https://de-m-wikipedia-org.translate.goog/Enagisma)

So, that's in relation to Epicurus's father, mother, and brothers. It looks like standard practice for the dead.

The "the customary celebration of (Epicurus's) birthday" and "the meeting of all my School held every month on the twentieth day to commemorate Metrodorus" strikes me as those days each month dedicated to gods like Apollo, Aphrodite, Dionysus, etc. There is no specific word in those phrases that refer to a specific kind of celebration like enagisma.

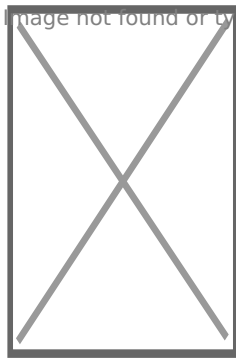
"Let them also join in celebrating the day in Poseideon which commemorates my brothers."
συντελείτῳσαν δὲ καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμέραν τοῦ Ποσειδεῶνος:..."

The "celebrating" the day in Poseidon is συντελέω synteleo (συντελείτῳσαν); and, according to LSJ, that is "celebrate or hold sacred rites."

"...and likewise the day in Metageitnion which commemorates Polyaeus, as I have done hitherto." συντελείτῳσαν δὲ καὶ τὴν Πολυαίνου τοῦ Μεταγειτνιῶνος καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς. The same word συντελείτῳσαν is used here as well. So, the practicing of "sacred rites" was established by Epicurus himself for his brothers and Polyaeus. In fact, both "funeral offerings" and monthly "sacred rites" were performed for Epicurus's brother.

The book *The Sacrificial Rituals of Greek Hero-Cults in the Archaic to the Early Hellenistic Period* by Gunnel Ekroth is available for reading online. It sheds some light on the terms within those texts:

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[Chapter I. Terms assumed to be related to hero-cult rituals](#)

In the modern literature on hero-cults, a number of terms have been classified as being particularly applicable to the sacrifices to heroes. This terminology...

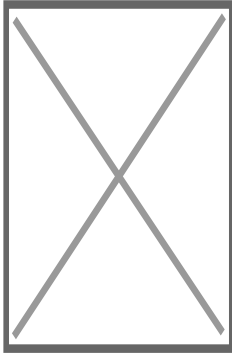
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Quote

The general tendency in modern scholarship has been to regard enagizein and its associated nouns as particularly connected with sacrifices to the dead and the heroes....Casabona's detailed study of the sacrificial terminology has shown, however, that the relation between enagizein and thyein is that of a technical term versus a very general term.

...

On the general level, the meaning of enagizein has been understood as tabu facere, to render sacred or to place in the domain of the sacred, i.e., to remove from the sphere of the living.²³⁷ Concerning the rituals covered by the terms, two main explanations have been advanced. On the one hand, enagizein has been considered to refer to a total destruction of the victims or offerings by burning them in a holocaust.²³⁸ In this sense, an enagizein sacrifice would imply that no part of the animal would be available for consumption by the worshippers. On the other hand, the terms have been linked to various kinds of libations, such as wine, melikraton, milk and, in particular, blood.²³⁹ It has also been suggested that enagizein and the related nouns can refer to both kinds of actions, i.e., the discarding of the blood of the animal followed by the burning of the carcass.



[Chapter IV. The ritual pattern](#)

1. The sacrificial rituals of Greek hero-cults This study has had two aims, first of all, to establish the sacrificial rituals of Greek hero-cults in the...

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Quote

Destruction sacrifices at which no dining took place, covered by the terms *holokautos* in the inscriptions and *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos* in the literary texts, are rare and cannot be considered as the regular kind of ritual in hero-cults. All the terms seem to cover the same kind of ritual, the destruction of the offerings, but they have different bearings on the character of the recipient. *Holokautos* was more neutral, being used for both heroes and gods, while *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos* are particular to hero-cults and the cult of the dead. Apart from referring to a destruction sacrifice, *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos* also mark the recipient as being dead and therefore impure in some sense, and distinguish him, or a side of him, from the gods, who are immortal and pure. In most cases, the destruction sacrifices to heroes were performed as separate rituals and not in connection with a *thysia*.

I found the underlined section interesting in that the gods in Epicurean theology were "immortal and pure" and Epicureans were seen as able to live akin to the gods in life. Since there is NO afterlife in Epicurean philosophy, it's also interesting to think how these rites would be interpreted within the Garden.