To Whom Was Epicurus' Last Letter Addressed?

Post by “Don” of December 31, 2024 at 7:29 AM

I need to go "back to the books" before sharing half-baked ideas!

I've been under the mistaken idea that the Hermarchus/Idomeneus letter was Epicurus' will. Egads! I got that wrong. To cement this in my mind: The will is DL 10.16-21. The letter in question is just a short section of DL 10.22.

The will lays out, in detail, what Epicurus wants done, including (emphasis added):

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19 And let Amynomachus and Timocrates take care of Epicurus, the son of Metrodorus, and of the son of Polyaenus, *so long as they study and live with Hermarchus*. Let them likewise provide for the maintenance of Metrodorus's daughter,32 *so long as she is well-ordered and obedient to Hermarchus*; and, when she comes of age, give her in marriage to a husband *selected by Hermarchus* from among the members of the School ; and out of the revenues accruing to me let Amynomachus and Timocrates *in consultation with Hermarchus* give to them as much as they think proper for their maintenance year by year. ... *Let them make Hermarchus trustee of the funds*33 along with themselves, in order that everything may be done in concert with him, who has grown old with me in philosophy and is left at the head of the School. And when the girl comes of age, let Amynomachus and Timocrates pay her dowry, taking from thep roperty as much as circumstances allow, *subject to the approval of Hermarchus*. ... And *if anything should happen to Hermarchus* before the children of Metrodorus grow up, Amynomachus and Timocrates shall give from the funds bequeathed by me, so far as possible, enough for their several needs, as long as they are well ordered. "

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The letter in question in 10.22 just says: *watch over the children of Metrodorus*.

Throughout the will, Hermarchus is assigned the care of Metrodorus' son and daughter in the third person: ie, Hermarchus should do this. In the letter in 22, the addressee of the letter is asked "to watch over Metrodorus' children." It seems to me that it would make perfect sense for Epicurus to write a personal message to Hermarchus in the end asking him to watch the kids as a last personal memento for his trusted friend and student to keep.

In my opinion, this points to Cicero having the addressee correct.

There *was* a letter to Idomeneus, U130 (emphasis added):

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Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 18, p. 1117D: But if, Colotes, you had met with expressions of Socrates' such as Epicurus pens in *a letter to Idomeneus*: "So send us for the care of our sacred body an offering of first-fruits *on behalf of yourself and your children* – so I am inspired to put it;" to what more unmannerly terms could you have resorted? {Traditionally, first-fruits were offered to a god – support for Epicurus' bodily needs is so depicted.}

Athenaeus, Deipnosophists, VII p. 279F: It was in fact, for the sake of the belly and the pleasures of the flesh in general that *this man flattered Idomeneus* and Metrodorus. ... Epicurus, in fact, was the teacher of these men.

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Note that there are children mentioned in the letter to Idomeneus, but they're Idomeneus' children. Diogenes *could* have mixed up the letters in his piles of documents or a copyist confused them or any number of other misattributions.

For those reasons, I'm giving the point to Cicero... As much as it pains me to do it

PS. Having reread the text of the letters, it seems to me that Diogenes Greek text rings more personal and thus sounds more like a last note to a dear friend. Plus, Diogenes doesn't actually include the salutation to Hermarchus but only says there's also this letter "to Idomeneus". So right now:

1 point to Cicero for the salutation

2 points to Diogenes for a more authentic sounding text