

Philodemus Article Referencing Importance of Fidelity to Original Teachings of Epicurus

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Thanks to [Don](#) for this link to a very interesting article which discusses Philodemus' attitude not read the most important writings of the school. That it was essential for teachings: an Epicurean to know these texts was also mentioned by Cicero, who asks an Epicurean "*quis enim vestrum non edidicit Epicuri κυρίας δόξας?*" (indeed, who of you has not memorized the Principle Doctrines [*a list of main Epicurean maxims*] by Epicurus?) Moreover, in a fragment of an unidentified text, Philodemus is outraged by certain Epicureans who had not read complete texts by the founder, but only summeries:

ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐγνωσμένος ἦ καὶ
δυστορημένος ὑπ' ἡμῶν, ὃς καὶ
φησι εἶν[α]ι ὁ γνήσιος
ἀναγνώ[σ]της ἐπὶ γραφᾶς
[ἐγλεκ]τὰς καὶ πλήθη
συγγρα[μμ]άτων, κἂν βάλῃ [γ]ε
[κα]λῶς, ἀνείληφε πολ[λὰ]ς ἐγλογὰς
καὶ τῶν μ[ε]ν ἐπὶ μέρους
διανο[η]μάτων ἀπειρότατός ἐστιν.
ἃ δὲ προσάττεται ποιεῖν, ἐπὶ
κεφάλαι[α] βλέπει, καθάπερ ὄν
λ[έ]γουσιν ἐκ βιβλίου
κυβ[ερνή]την καὶ διὰ παντ[ός] - -]

He who claims to know us and to be instructed by us, who claims to be a genuine reader of various writings and of complete books, even if he says something correctly, he has only memorized various quotations and does not know the multitude of our thoughts. What he has to do, he looks up in summeries, like people who believe that they [can learn to be] steersman from books and [can cross every ocean].

It is not possible, Philodemus argues, to be a decent philosopher without reading the founder's original texts, in the same way that nobody can learn to steer a ship without practical experience. Somewhat ironically, Philodemus tries to encourage people to read the original texts with an example where reading lots of books is counteractive. In addition, further in this text Philodemus writes that not reading enough is unforgivable for Epicureans:

ἀλλὰ τὸ σχετικώτατον ἐκεῖν' ἐστὶν [ἐ]πὶ
τοῖς πλείοσιν τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ὃ τὴν ἐν
τοῖς βιβλί[ο]ις ἀ[νε]νεργησίαν
ἀπαραίτητον ποιεῖ...

but the most shocking thing of most
Epicureans is the unforgivable inactivity in
regards to the books...

Phil. *PHerc.* 1005 col. 14.13-18.

Philodemus is not satisfied with second-hand knowledge of the doctrine. For him, it is a requirement that every Epicurean is well-versed in the writings of their master: these are, after all, the ties that bind the community together. According to Philodemus, someone