

"Kepos" - Epicurus' Garden Name, Location, History

Post by "Kalosyni" of February 28, 2023 at 9:54 AM

It has always puzzled me as to why the Garden of Epicurus was referred to as "Kepos" -- and perhaps there was something in the minds of people at his time which we don't fully grasp.

Looking at Greek mythology there is the garden of Hera, also called Garden of the Hesperides.

From the internet: "The Garden of the Hesperides is Hera's orchard in the west, where either a single apple tree or a grove grows, producing golden apples." ([Wikipedia](#))

...and...

"The Golden Apples in the Garden of Hesperides were a wedding gift to Hera from Gaia and were protected by a great serpent called Ladon. The Apples as well as the rest of the life in the Garden were tended by the Hesperides, minor earth goddesses or nymphs and daughters of the Titan, Atlas."

"The Garden itself was completely ruled by the Olympian gods and goddesses, therefore completely inaccessible to mortals. To complete his twelve labors, Hercules was sent to the garden to retrieve three of these golden apples for King Eurystheus."

"To find the exact location of the Garden of Hesperides, Hercules had to pry the information from Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea, encounter and free Prometheus, kill Ladon, and implore [Atlas](#) to pick the apples for him. Eager to sit aside his burden of holding up the heavens, Atlas convinced Hercules to take up the heavens in his place before deciding to take the apples to Eurystheus himself and leave Hercules there. Hercules tricked him by claiming he needed to make a pad for his shoulders to hold the heavens up more comfortably, asking Atlas to take them up again for a moment. When Atlas held the heavens again, Hercules snatched the apples from him and left. After this long adventure to get the apples, Athena rather anticlimactically took the Apples from Eurystheus and returned them to the Garden."

([Source](#))

So thinking further on how this mythical garden was thought to be inaccessible to mortals, in contrast we have "Kepos" and this could give some indication as to the nature of the Epicurean garden -- and the Epicurean hope that mortals could live as blissfully as the gods.

Also I looked up on cultivation of apples, and found this, which says they were cultivated in ancient Greece ([source](#)).

So perhaps there was an apple tree in the Kepos 😊

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2023 at 9:58 AM

So are there subtle connotations to the word "kepos"? I have never taken the time to pursue it.

Post by “Don” of February 28, 2023 at 10:53 AM

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, κῆπος](#)

I've always taken it that he simply taught in his garden. Just like the Plato's Academy was in the gymnasium named for the Athenian hero, Akademos. Outside the city walls of Athens, the gymnasium was made famous by Plato as a center of learning.

Lyceum is a Latin rendering of the Ancient Greek Λύκειον (lykeion), the name of a gymnasium in Classical Athens dedicated to Apollo Lyceus. This original lyceum is remembered as the location of the peripatetic school of Aristotle.

The stoics were named for the Stoa Poikile, the Painted Stoa, the public arcade in the Agora.

So, it was very common to name the school of philosophy for there they met. Epicurus was somewhat unique I understand because he taught on his own private property - his garden - and not in a public setting.

PS. I should add that some of those descriptions above are cut and pasted from Wikipedia. It was easier to do than composing info about the lyceum and academy.

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 28, 2023 at 2:29 PM

Riffing off of Don's observations, I'd like to re-designate the Stoics as "*the Stoop Kids*", the Peripatetics as "*Ramblers*", the Academics as "*Gold-Diggers*", the Cynics as "*Growlers*", and ... I suppose the Skeptics would still, appropriately be called "*Pyrrhonists*" as followers of Pyrrho. And while we *could* refer to ourselves as "*Gardeners*", I **much** prefer the designation that Athenaeus provides in *Deipnosophistae* (5:3), that we are ΠΡΟΦΗΤΑΣ ΑΤΟΜΩΝ, or, "***Atom Prophets***".

Post by “Joshua” of February 28, 2023 at 2:53 PM

Quote

I much prefer the designation that Athenaeus provides in Deipnosophistae (5:3), that we are ΠΡΟΦΗΤΑΣ ΑΤΟΜΩΝ, or, "Atom Prophets".

I like this, it reminds me of the Machine Priests from The Foundation Trilogy.

Post by “Don” of February 28, 2023 at 7:59 PM

Could we go so far as the Atomic Prophets to give it a psychedelic 60s vibe?

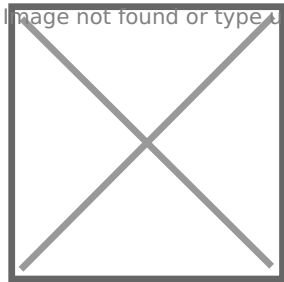
As for the Stoop Kids, I'd also offer Porch Preachers.

Skeptics are Pyrrho Maniacs.

Post by “Don” of May 3, 2024 at 7:59 AM

For those coming across this thread later, here a link to my article about the size and location of the Kepos and a talk I gave at a 20th online gathering:

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[Where was the Garden of Epicurus? The Evidence from the Ancient Sources and Archaeology - Epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2930-kepos-epicurus-garden-name-location-history/)

While we will probably never know the exact location of Epicurus's Garden in ancient Athens, we can take a number of educated guesses.

www.epicureanfriends.com

Post by “Pacatus” of May 7, 2024 at 4:27 PM

By Zeus, [Don](#) , what an impressive, well-written work of scholarship!

I was particularly caught by this: “ ... large enough to attract the attention of Memmius, a well-to-do Roman citizen, who wanted to raze the property and construct his own **villa** on the site.” Now, Epicurus’ abode may not have been as extensive as a villa, but this would indicate that either (1) a significant portion of the plot on which his house existed was the grounds (cultivated? how?) , and/or (2) Epicurus’ house may have been a bit more than a humble cottage.

Post by “Little Rocker” of May 15, 2024 at 3:52 PM

This is great, Don! I tracked down a passage I seemed to remember from an article by Diskin Clay to the effect that Memmius probably purchased Epicurus' house in town, the one in Melite. Which means Epicurus owned *two* pieces of property, one of them, as Pactatus notes, suitable for renovation into a larger villa:

"Years after his philosophical stay in Athens Cicero wrote (in 51 BC) to Gaius Memmius (the addressee of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*) on behalf of Patro, then the head of the Epicurean school in Athens who had followed Phaedrus. Cicero's purpose was to dissuade Memmius from pulling down the ruins of Epicurus' house in Melite within the city walls. He sent a copy of this letter to Atticus to reinforce his plea. Epicurus' house and small garden near the Hill of the Nymphs were in ruins by the time Cicero wrote to Memmius and Atticus, but the school and Patro's feelings of reverence and duty to Epicurus and his fellow Epicureans in Athens is evident from Cicero's letter to Memmius."

Post by “Don” of May 15, 2024 at 5:57 PM

Thanks, [Little Rocker](#) !!!

I had not seen the Hill of the Nymphs references before! Maybe time for a revision of that paper of mine 😊

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2024 at 7:52 PM

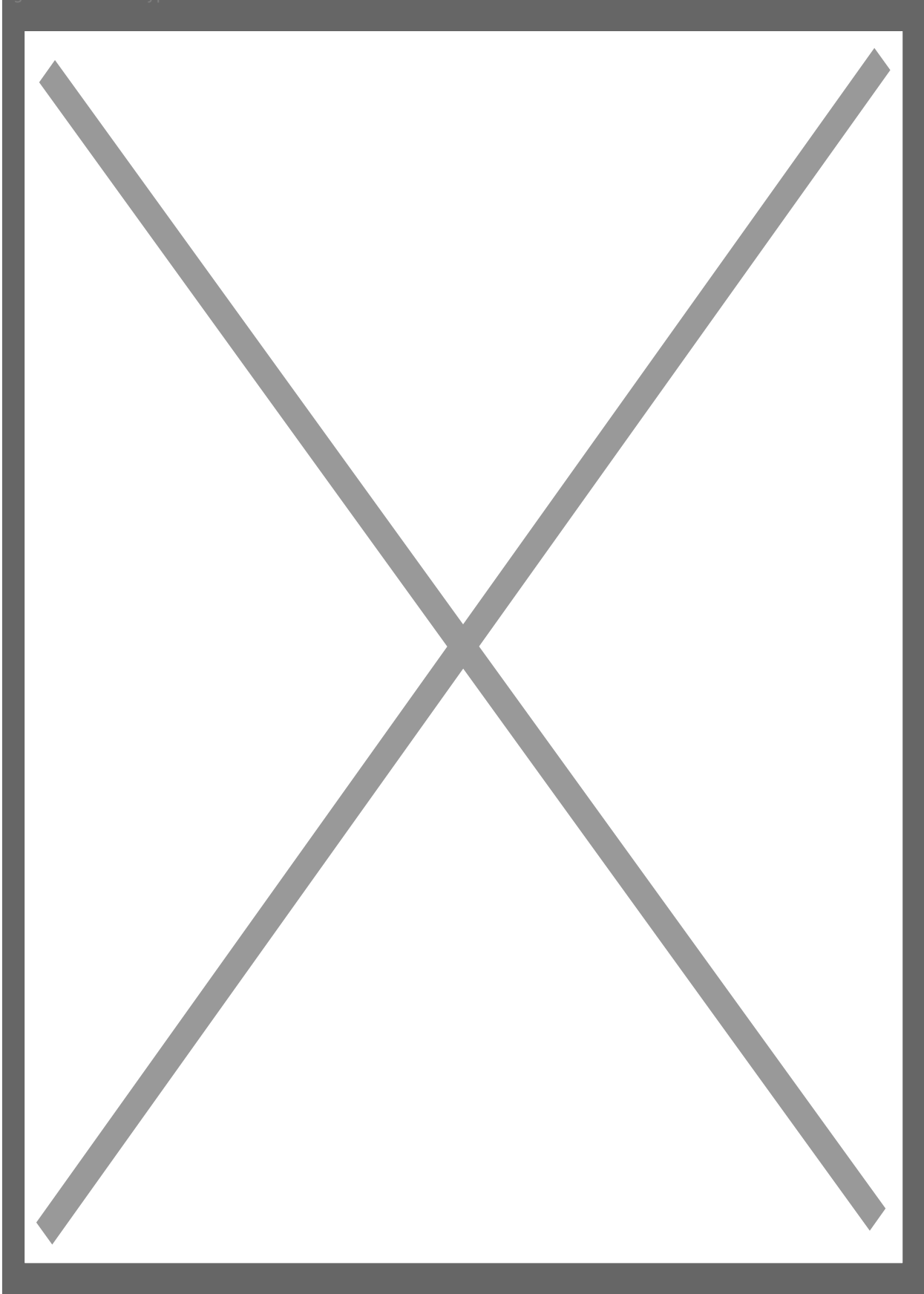
I suspect we will never have much data on what I am about to mention, but the reference to Epicurus' house being in ruins at the time of Memmius raises questions as to whether the successor leaders of the Epicurean school failed to make proper use of their inheritance from Epicurus, or whether perhaps the house was destroyed in a war, or whatever led to it (and/or the garden property) not being maintained over that period.

One of the subtexts that anyone who is interested in a revitalized Epicurean school, as opposed to simply personal self-help, is the question of whether the organization of the ancient Epicurean school failed in some way, or whether its demise was entirely the fault of outside pressures, or some combination of both. Presumably a combination is more likely, but that leaves the question for future discussion of what steps might have been taken then, or should be taken now, to enhance the survivability of Epicurean organizations.

Post by “Don” of May 15, 2024 at 11:09 PM

First:

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[Google Maps](#)

Find local businesses, view maps and get driving directions in Google Maps.

maps.app.goo.gl

This would be the modern walking route from the Hill of the Nymphs in the ancient district of Melite to one of the potential points in the Garden outside the city walls in the ancient Kerameikos district. Even today, with the twisting streets, its an easy 26 min. walk. Tantalizing! I have to dig more into the Hill of the Nymphs possible location for Epicurus' house.

Now:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the reference to Epicurus' house being in ruins at the time of Memmius raises questions as to whether the successor leaders of the Epicurean school failed to make proper use of their inheritance from Epicurus, or whether perhaps the house was destroyed in a war, or whatever led to it (and/or the garden property) not being maintained over that period.

To me, there's every indication that The Garden (Ho Kepos) was maintained from Epicurus's time as leader of the school in Athens (306-270 BCE) right through the time of Cicero (1st c BCE) and into the reign of Hadrian (late 1st c CE-early 2nd c CE) and beyond. That's 400+ years! There aren't many institutions that can boast that kind of track record!

As I maintain in my paper, The Garden was large enough to easily house a number of residences and other buildings within it. Over time, there may not have been, other than for sentimental reasons, to maintain the house and small household garden (hortulus), within the city walls. Maybe the scholarch stayed in The Garden itself in a residence? The Garden was *the* school, not the former residence of the "Master-builder of Happiness." There's also this in Wikipedia on the [History of Athens](#):

In 88-85 BC, most Athenian fortifications and homes were leveled by the Roman general Sulla after the Siege of Athens and Piraeus, although many civic buildings and monuments were left intact. (See also the article on the [Siege of Athens and Piraeus](#))

Melite residence = "homes"; The Garden = "civic buildings and monuments"??

[Quote from Cassius](#)

One of the subtexts that anyone who is interested in a revitalized Epicurean school, as opposed to simply personal self-help, is the question of whether the organization of the ancient Epicurean school failed in some way

Failed?? If the Epicurean school had a consistent lineage of scholarchs for *over four centuries* from the death of Epicurus (270 BCE) up to and past the time of Pompeia Plotina and Emperior

Hadrian (120s CE) and was still enough of a force to be denounced by early Christian writers, I would call it *wildly* successful! The school had adherents/students from Gaul to Asia Minor to Egypt! The United States is only coming up on 2-1/2 centuries. Any human institution is going to have a lifespan... but the fact that we're here discussing Epicurus's ideas 2,300+ years later bodes well for the "Epicurean school," in my opinion.

Post by "Don" of May 17, 2024 at 8:39 AM

I would have to check the sources, but my feeling is that after Epicurus, the Epicurean school became much more decentralized. During Epicurus's lifetime, he talks about far-flung students sending money to him (which I'm going to assume he used for the upkeep and running of his household and school). After his death, did students support the school and succeeding scholarchs in the same way? Or did they concentrate on their own local Epicurean efforts? For example, Diogenes didn't commission a stoa wall in Athens; he built one in his own hometown of Oenoanda. Philodemus, while he did study in Athens at THE Garden with THE scholarch, was active in Herculaneum not Athens. The Garden in Athens wasn't a Vatican. Maybe the decentralization was both a strength and a weakness in the end, allowing the school to spread but not having a central "authority" by which to "impose its will" throughout, say, an Empire... Like certain later organizations.

Post by "Cassius" of May 17, 2024 at 8:55 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

During Epicurus's lifetime,

My impression (just an impression) is that in Epicurus' time he wasn't facing organized region-wide central opposition from opposing radically intolerant schools (religions) of his day, and that the final submersion of the school coincides with the rise of that centralized and radically intolerant religious authority. So in fairness to Epicurus and the early leaders, they didn't have much reason to expect the rise of opposing and intolerant forces that couldn't be dealt with, even in an extreme situation, simply by moving to another city or region.

The successful emergence of Judeo-Christianity as a "worldwide" force of intolerance, and the institutions that that it set up to enforce compliance, weren't yet on the horizon in 250 BC. So any "failures" to adapt (and I am not trying to be critical of any individuals, just noting that it

occurred) was something that happened significantly later. Apparently through as late as 40 or so BC in Cicero's time, and probably later, an argument could be made that Epicureanism and organized teaching of it was still very successful. So fingering the critical time period and the critical inability to adapt / respond in some way (even by moving to another region in rough analogy to Mormonism) would come much later than the founding period.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2024 at 10:50 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Apparently through as late as 40 or so BC in Cicero's time, and probably later, an argument could be made that Epicureanism and organized teaching of it was still very successful.

I would offer that that period of success extended from ~300 BCE when Epicurus was founding The Garden in Athens (after a successful period in Lampsacus) to the intervention of Pompeia Plotina in the 120s CE to allow Popillius Theotimus, the acting head of the Epicurean school in Athens, to become the official head *and* to allow subsequent scholarchs of The Garden to be either Greek or Roman. ([See also](#)) That's 400 years of fairly stable (it sounds like) succession and administration of The Garden, with evidence of Epicurean appreciation extending all the way into the 3rd c CE (200s CE) at Oenoanda in *Asia Minor* and then Diogenes Laertius (probably also from *Asia Minor*) was still writing approvingly of Epicurus in the early-mid 200s CE. So, around 500 years of solid pro-Epicurean evidence, well into the "Christian" era. Clement of Alexandria in *Egypt* (c. 150 - c. 215 AD) was also stealing Greek philosophical ideas for Christian doctrine.

The problem with the eventual downfall of a formal Epicurean school in Athens seems to have been common to many of the philosophical schools. So, I don't think we can look to something unique to the Epicureans, since the Academy, the Lyceum, etc. all met similar fates. Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, and the Peripatetic philosophy could be incorporated into Christian doctrine, not by name, of course, but they could be co-opted to appeal to educated Greeks (and Romans). Epicurean philosophy was anathema to most Christians, so it was never incorporated with credit. Clement could define philosophy in a way that allowed for the Christians to incorporate what they wanted, cafeteria-style, and give no credit to the school: “By philosophy I do not mean the Stoic nor the Platonic, or the Epicurean and Aristotelian, but everything that has been well said by each of the schools and that teaches righteousness along with science marked by reverence; this eclectic whole I call philosophy” (Strom., i. 7. 732CD). I don't think it was a failure on the part of The Garden's scholarchs, adherents, or students or those flung across the

Empire. They were all swept up in a world not of their making and hostile to their teachings. To paraphrase *Star Trek's* Borg "Resistance was futile."

All that said, the philosophy DID survive, underground, often unacknowledged, transmitted through the centuries, a fire then lit from a spark kept warm until the Renaissance. Dante had to include the Epicureans being punished in a book he wrote in the 1300s! They were still seen as a threat and had to be "put in their place" so to speak, inside a sealed coffin... and so we continue the story here on a digital forum in the 21st century. 2,300 years after the death of the school's founder!

Personally, I take inspiration from that story. Epicurus remains relevant after almost 2-1/2 millennia! We live in a world that seems ripe for the life-affirming message of Epicurus. I've said elsewhere that we will never reconstruct The Garden. We don't know enough to reconstruct the administration, structure, etc. nor do I think we want to. BUT we could take inspiration from the - let's call it - "Epicurean diaspora" in the ancient world.

Post by "Cassius" of May 18, 2024 at 3:18 AM

First - I agree with most of that, so that's my primary comment ***but*** :

[Quote from Don](#)

They were all swept up in a world not of their making and hostile to their teachings. To paraphrase *Star Trek's* Borg "Resistance was futile."

NEIN!

Captain Kirk would have found a way! (That's why I stopped watching after TOS - that confident and positive spirit - which Cicero denounced in Velleius, and Lucian mentioned in Alexander the Oracle Monger, and which I strongly associate with Epicurus - seemed missing.)

[Quote from Don](#)

I've said elsewhere that we will never reconstruct The Garden. We don't know enough to reconstruct the administration

No it won't be recreated exactly - but it can be recreated in spirit and in new and even better ways if capable and dedicated people come along to work hard enough. All the primary elements survive and they provide the keys to reconstruct the rest

To take the attitude that failure is inevitable would be to give in to a fatalistic determinism that Epicurus was right in rejecting.



Post by “Don” of May 18, 2024 at 6:24 AM



Well, if I remember, the Borg were finally defeated sort of, so maybe not a perfect analogy... but I knew my *Star Trek* analogy would get a reaction from [Cassius](#) . Mission accomplished. (I'll point out that Kirk changed the parameters of the [Kobayashi Maru test](#), so he didn't really beat it as it was presented... He held the philosophical position that there were no un-winnable scenarios. For those non-Trekkies, [Look it up](#) 😊)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

No it won't be recreated exactly - but it can be recreated in spirit and in new and even better ways if capable and dedicated people come along to work hard enough. All the primary elements survive and they provide the keys to reconstruct the rest

To take the attitude that failure is inevitable would be to give in to a fatalistic determinism that Epicurus was right in rejecting.

On a slightly more serious note: When this conversation bubbles up, I have to ask: What reconstruction or recreation are you envisioning or anticipating? To be perfectly clear, I'm not being snarky or sarcastic. I genuinely am not sure what we're talking about when this topic comes up? Here are some scenarios that everyone is welcome to respond to:

1. Are *you* (writ large , not referring to [Cassius](#) here) wanting a central authority to lay down Epicurean doctrine and practice? An institutional recreation?
2. Are you wanting a more widespread acknowledgement of Epicurean philosophy in the wider culture or popular mindset a la "Stoicism"?
3. Are you wanting local autonomous groups that live together in some kind of Epicurean "community" like the Amish do?
4. Are you wanting Epicurean as a checkbox on census forms or Epicurean "chaplains" in the armed forces? Social and official political recognition?

This is not an exhaustive list of questions, but I would sincerely like us to put some flesh on the idea of a reconstructed/reinvigorated/recreated Epicurean School. Right now, even the modern Stoic groups don't agree with each other, and there are at least 3-4 Epicurean groups (online

and in-person) that don't all agree with each other on certain points. How would each of those groups describe or envision a recreated or reconstructed Garden?

[Quote from Cassius](#)

failure is inevitable

Many Epicurean ideas continued and in many ways have actually won the day (atomism, material world, etc.) for many, many people. I'm not going to get into politics about the opposition to those ideas in the present. That 500 year run of Epicurus's philosophy being influential officially and the subsequent 1,800 years of "stealth" influence on the culture doesn't strike me as failure. Maybe that is what rankles me about talk of "reconstruction of The Garden." After 2,300 years, Epicurean philosophy hasn't gone anywhere. It's still here, still relevant, and still a force to be reckoned with... Even if it goes unnoticed.

Post by "Cassius" of May 18, 2024 at 7:52 AM

Those are good questions and this following is a truncated answer. Aspects of all four are probably true, but with major qualifications in my own mind as to each one. For the time being:

1. There can never be another Epicurus, but there can be separate "schools" in all sorts of institutional forms, formal and informal, and they will want to (have to, to remain organized) spell out their own lists of important principles and understandings of Epicurus for the sake of their own clarity of association.
2. Sure I would think that cultural recognition in popular discussion would be an inevitable outcome of increased Epicurean activity.
3. Yes but I personally have never accepted that Epicureans lived in "communes." It's only natural and consistent with the last several PDs that people of like mind would want to live near each other for mutual support. Online is the starting point and then later should come geographic closeness. Until positions clarify as to more precise lines of what "Epicurean" means, it doesn't make sense to talk about anything closer than online. I've indicated before and still hold that many who claim to be of Epicurean attitude (but which I consider to be "quietist" or "tranquilist") I would personally want nothing to do with, just as I am sure that they would not want to associate with me. This issue is something that to me precedes in importance all the other questions and has to come first.
4. That would not be my idea of a major short term goal, and my favored governments would not be in the business of granting favors or privileges to religions, but similar to answer 2 in

some circumstances I do think it should be normal for people to consider themselves as "Epicurean" and to be proud of that label.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 18, 2024 at 8:04 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

When this conversation bubbles up, I have to ask: What reconstruction or recreation are you envisioning or anticipating?

I think that there are as many dreams of a modern "Kepos" as there are individuals who enjoy Epicurus, and to create any kind of organization would require a leader (or leaders) who can clarify the Epicurean philosophy in such a way that a group of people find it appealing and worthwhile to join together to study and discuss (and to have shared 20th meals 😊).

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 18, 2024 at 9:09 AM

We have a good thread already started for discussion on organizing communities:

Thread

[Thoughts and Discussion on Organizing Epicurean Community](#)

This is a thread to explore ideas about organizing and developing Epicurean community. Any one can add any thoughts or ideas about this.

Who are we?

What do we need or want?

What are we hoping for?

Here is an interesting article excerpt:

[...]

In the future we could become a registered non-profit, but we need to clarify what it is we are doing and what we want to see happen within our Epicurean community.

Also perhaps we have differing viewpoints or ideas about what we want?

Who are we?

What do we need or...



Kalosyni

September 15, 2022 at 7:31 PM

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 14, 2025 at 2:15 PM

For anyone who has an understanding of ancient Greek language ([Bryan](#) [Don](#) [Eikadistes](#) ...would the Garden actually have been referred to as "Ho Kepos" or just "Kepos"?

Edit note: I just found this on a Reddit thread:

Quote

Epicurus' garden school of philosophy in Ancient Athens was called “Ho Kepos” - ὁ κῆπος. ὁ (ho) means simply "the" in the nominative (the subject) and κῆπος is the nominative form of "garden" "the garden"

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 14, 2025 at 2:30 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For anyone who has an understanding of ancient Greek language ([Bryan](#) [Don](#) [Eikadistes](#) ...would the Garden actually have been referred to as "Ho Kepos" or just "Kepos"?

The way I look at it (*again, total amateur here*), the article ὁ helps indicate that "the Garden" is a proper noun, the name of some unique place, as opposed to a "garden", which could be one of many. I imagine that Athenian Epicureans could have casually disregarded the article, but it's sort of like ... "The Beatles". You'll always put "The" in front of the brand unless you are referring to each "Beatle" individually, or the group of those four people as "Beatles", but the band, proper, is "The Beatles", and it indicates more than just a group of four people; it indicates their entire brand.

Post by "Bryan" of August 14, 2025 at 3:34 PM

Thanks [Eikadistes](#)!

On a slightly related note, it seems that many authors were in the habit of using the plural.

Heraclitus (fl. f. 50^{CE}), Allegories of Homer, 4

ὁ δὲ Φαίαξ φιλόσοφος Ἐπίκουρος "ὅτῃς ἡδονῆς ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις κήποις γεωργὸς"

Phaiāx calls the philosopher Epicurus "the cultivator of pleasure in his own gardens"

Seneca (fl. 35^{CE}), Letters to Lucilius, 4.10

Accipe quod mihi hodiernō diē placuit – et hoc quoque ex aliēnīs hortulīs sumptum est:

Receive what has pleased me on this very day – and this too has been taken from little foreign gardens

Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, 21.10

"ecquid bene acceptus es? nōn irritant" inquit "hī Hortulī famem, sed exstinguunt

"were you well received?" he says "these little gardens do not provoke hunger, but they quench it"

Cicero, On the Laws, 1.13.39

in hortulis suis iubeamus dicere...

In their small gardens let us allow them to speak...

There are more from Athenaeus and Plutarch.