

The Greek Anthology - An Overview

Post by “Joshua” of December 8, 2020 at 10:58 PM

The Greek Anthology

Anthologia - A Gathering of Flowers

The [Greek Anthology](#) is a collection of some 4,500 epigrams, poems, inscriptions, and proverbs of the Greek language, composed by several hundred authors, and compiled over a period of more than a thousand years. The chief feature of this unusual collection is its range and scope, covering as it does a great many people, places, historical periods, themes, and topics. The unifying characteristic of these texts is their brevity; most of the epigrams are only a few lines long. Each epigram is a narrow window onto the lives of antiquity. Altogether, they are an indispensable treasure trove of Ancient Greek thought and culture---the flotsam of a ship wrecked in Time.

The Purpose of This Subforum

There are no epigrams in this collection attributed to Epicurus himself. We are specifically interested in:

- Epigrams that mention Epicurus or his philosophy (including several on Democritus);
- Epigrams that speak to clear Epicurean themes;
- Epigrams that shed further light on their Epicurean authors (in the cases of Lucian and Philodemus).

Epigrams that touch on competing schools of philosophy, and on the rise of Christianity, will also be included.

The preference in all cases will be to include the original Greek text, and a public-domain English translation (e.g. W. R. Paton).

The Epigrams

The word *epigram* refers literally to an inscription, and many of the earliest texts in the collection are likely to be of that kind. These inscriptions--on statues, tombs, temples, and monuments--developed over time a style of their own, and this style eventually grew into a literary art-form. Most of the epigrams in the *Anthology* are not inscriptions at all, but merely poems or proverbs that follow the style. As Parmenion writes in book IX, no. 342:

"An epigram of many lines does not, I say, conform to the Muses' law. Seek not the long course in the short stadion. The long race has many rounds, but in the stadion sharp and short is the

strain on the wind."

The Epigrammatists

Two of the important authors in the *Anthology* were Epicureans. [Lucian](#) of Samosata was a satirist of the second century, whose most important Epicurean work is "[Alexander](#) the False Prophet". [Philodemus](#) of Gadara was a philosopher and poet of the first century BCE, most notable as the author whose books survived the eruption of Vesuvius and were preserved beneath the ash in the ancient Roman villa known as the [Villa of the Papyri](#). Both authors speak in this collection on a variety of themes, and not all of them will be relevant to Epicurean Philosophy.

A third author of note is [Palladas](#). While not a confessed Epicurean, his epigrams are tinted with Epicurean themes. He is also important to us as one of the last great classically pagan witnesses to the Christianization of the Roman world--a trend he greatly abhorred.