

Philodemus On Piety

Post by "Don" of December 25, 2020 at 10:05 PM

The following are excerpts and notes from columns 27-36 of Obbink's Philodemus On Piety which outline the participation of Epicurus himself and the early Epicureans in religious festivals and other rites and practices. Obbink also shared more detailed notes in his book, so I may try and share some of those pages in later posts. For now, the material below has proved quite interesting...

Quoted in col. 27, On Piety: Epicurus, On Gods (Περὶ θεῶν): as being both the greatest thing and that which excels in sovereignty possesses everything; for every wise man holds pure and holy beliefs (καθαρὰς καὶ ἁγίους δόξας) about the divine (τοῦ θεοῦ) and had understood that this nature [or 'this entity'] is great and august (καὶ μεγάλην τε καὶ σεμνήν). And it is particularly at festivals (εὐροπή) that he, progressing to an understanding of it [i.e. divine nature], through having its name the whole time on his lips, embraces it with conviction more seriously..."

Notes

σεμνός (< σεμνήν)

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...7:entry=semno/s>

revered, august, holy

Col. 28/9: Epicurus wrote to Phyrson during the archonship of Aristonymus (289/8 BCE) about Phyrson's countryman from Colophon, Theodotus, Epicurus says that he (Epicurus) shared in all the festivals... Epicurus celebrated the festival of the Choes and the urban mysteries and the other festivals at a meagre dinner, and that it was necessary for him (prob. Theodotus) to celebrate this feast of the Twentieth for distinguished revelers, while those in the house decorated it most piously ('ολως) and after making invitations to host a feast for all of them.

Notes

For festivals, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthesteria>

The Choes were part of this festival dedicated to Dionysus

The "urban mysteries" refer to the Attic Dionysia, either the Lenaea (in the month of Gamelion, Epicurus's birth month) or Lesser Mysteries during 20-6 Anthesteria, both in honor of Dionysus.

I find it interesting that the festivals mentioned were dedicated to Dionysus. It could just be coincidence that those are mentioned; or Athens had a lot of Dionysian festivals; or Epicurus

had an affinity for Dionysian festivals or the god. No way to tell from what I've read so far.

Col. 29: Epicurus advised them to retain asserations made by means of these and similar expressions, and above all to preserve those made by Zeus himself (maintain the practice of swearing by Zeus by name νή Δία!)... Not merely "it must be so!"

Notes

So, Epicureans, feel free to pepper your writing and conversation with νή Δία! "By Zeus!" 😊

Col. 30: during the archonship of Charinus (291/0 BCE) and that of Diotimus (285/4 BCE), Epicurus wrote letters warning against violating the covenant of the sacred festival table.

Notes

Much of these lines is reconstructed. Extant:

δε Χάρι...

Διοτίμ....

την κα[θ' ιεράς τρα-

πεζης [συνθήκην μη

παραβαί[νειν· καί

Col.31: Epicurus, in a letter to Polyaeus, writes: "(It is necessary for us) to conceive of their nature as accurately constituting the notion of benefit according to the epistemological standard (kriterion). Let us sacrifice to that gods devoutly and fittingly on that proper days, and let us fittingly perform all the acts of worship in accordance with the laws, in no way disturbing ourselves with opinions on matters concerning the most excellent and august of beings. Moreover, let us sacrifice justly, on the view that I was giving. For in this way it is possible for mortal nature, by Zeus, to live like Zeus, as it seems. And concerning obeisance (προσκυνήσεις) in [Epicurus's] On Lifecourses [Περί βίων]"

Notes

- devoutly and fittingly 'οσιως και καλως

- "in accordance with the laws (νόμους)" can also be translated as in accordance to custom"
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...entry=no%2Fmos2>

- obeisance (προσκυνήσεις) refers to "the custom of kneeling, prostration, or throwing kisses before statues of the gods or as marks of honor to important humans." Obbink recounts in the notes the story of Colotes embracing Epicurus's knees during a teaching session when Colotes was overcome with reverence toward his teacher.

Col. 32: Philodemus writes "statues of the gods Epicurus says that he reveres... .. he says that he employs observance in every natural conception of god taking up [one word missing] divinely [one word] to speak auspiciously."

Notes

- reveres = σέβομαι "to feel awe or fear before God, especially when about to do something disgraceful; to feel shame, religious awe"

- observance

- "natural conception of god" (της του δαιμονος επινοιας) Note we're using daimonos instead of theos here. Not sure why.

Col.33: Epicurus in a letter to Herodotus: "Even if there should be war, it would not be terrible, if the gods are propitious.

In a letter to Polyaeus: [Epicurus says he] has "lived and would continue to live a pure life with Matro himself, if the gods are propitious (same word as above)

Epicurus's brother and advanced student, Neocles, is quoted as saying: "it's necessary to distribute piously assistance from our money for the gods" in writing to Phyrson (Phyrson could be "a man second to none in political affairs.").

Notes

propitious (ἴλεων < ἴλαος propitious, gracious, merciful; kind, mild, gentle)

Matro: "i.e., Epicurus said that, if the gods were propitious, he would continue to live a pure life, Matro and all" Obbink has an extensive note on Matro. He was a παιδαγωγός paidagogos a slave-chaperone for students.

Neocles is literally said to have "achieved miraculous or marvelous (δαιμόνιον) advancement in his (Epicurus's) teachings") δαιμόνιον is the divine power, Deity, or in-dwelling spirit that also gives us the word eudaimonia and kakodaimonia. See also above in Column 32.

Columns 34 and 35 are very fragmentary, and I've commented on col. 36 previously.