

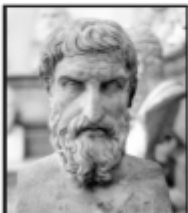
# Epicurus' Appearance - Research Into What He Looked Like

Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2021 at 6:42 AM

I am sure we have already covered this, but I will have to look up where and perhaps move the post. So here is the portion of Takis' paper, which I gather is based on Frischer, which traces the identification of Epicurus to the discovery of the inscribed bust in 1742 at St Maria Maggiore. What do we know about this "discovery?" Presumably it was not buried by Vesuvius, so wherever it was "discovered" someone put it there at a particular time. What do we know about how this bust came to be where it was 'discovered' in 1742? Is there some circumstance that would foreclose it being on display publicly somewhere at the time of Raphael or any other particular time for centuries beforehand? Not to trivialize this, but how do we know that someone who didn't like Epicurus in 1600 or 1650 or 1700 or even 1740 didn't just hide this away only to have it recovered relatively shortly later? I presume Bernard Frischer addresses this so that would be the next link in the chain.

## The inscribed busts of Epicurus

The discovery happened only just in 1742 in Rome. During works on the construction of a portico in the church St Maria Maggiore, they accidentally discovered the first double bust of Epicurus and Metrodorus, where their names were inscribed (Frischer, 1982, p. 151).



How the portrait of the Athenian philosopher Epicurus became known to us — Takis Panagiotopoulos

The double bust was immediately placed in the collection of Pope Benedict 14<sup>th</sup> (The British Museum, 1836, p.14). This discovery was grand because finally the portrait of Epicurus and Metrodorus became known. As an aftermath, it helped identify the remaining anonymous busts.

In 1753 a second discovery happened, a small bronze inscribed bust of Epicurus was found in the Villa of Papyrus at Herculaneum, Italy, amongst the ashes of Vesuvius. In this way, we have conclusive confirmation of Epicurus portrait. In total to this day, thirty busts of Epicurus have been discovered, all copies from the Roman period of Hellenistic prototypes, as Bernard Frischer states (1982, p. 175), "After so many centuries, we meet again the gentle character of this great philosopher".

## Statues of Epicurus

Today we know of seven statues that depict Epicurus, unfortunately without their heads. They all have the same theme, the philosopher seated, wearing a tunic and holding a rolled papyrus. Just in 1912 it became known that these types of statues depicted Epicurus, (Bernard Frischer, 1982 pp. 155).

This is from Frischer's 1979 article "On Reconstructing the Portrait of Epicurus"

de dismissed out of hand. Not only does the head bear no resemblance to Epicurus', but there is a simple historical reason why it could not possibly have. Before 1742, when the Epicurus-Metrodorus double herm with its ancient identifying inscription (Plate 7:1) was discovered beneath the new porch of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome (the herm is now in the Capitoline Museum<sup>57</sup>), Epicurus' true image was not known.<sup>57</sup> The question of what head Preister's engraving shows will be answered in a moment; now it is important to note that the discovery of a false head atop Ludovisi no. 243 (Schreiber) in 1732 can only mean that the statue was restored prior to that date.

Is it possible to determine what other restorations were made on the statue? This question is obviously important for our purposes because the point of departure of this study is the question of whether Preister's right arm is ancient or not. To answer it we must consider the states of preservation of statues 240, 243, and 245 in 1880. Schreiber writes:

57. See G. G. Bettari, *Del Museo Capitolino I* (Rome 1741) 14; O. Bonnacorsi, *Lettere scritte all'Accademia Etrusca di Corsone da un' accademico delle medesime sopra la sua immagine d'Epicuro* (Rome 1744). I have looked at the MS in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana of G. Bianchini's 1750 report on the archaeological finds that came to light during work on S. Maria Maggiore in the 1740s in the hope of finding mention of the discovery of the double herm; however, Bianchini does not happen to record this find, possibly because his report is more concerned with architecture than works of art. See Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Fondo Bianchini, T. 74, fol. 289r, incorrectly cited as T. 75, fol. 285r by G. Bianchi in his otherwise reliable transcription of the report in *Boll. d'Arte* 9 (1915) 145 n. 2. The discovery also is not mentioned in Bianchini's discussion of the portico in the same report (T. 74, fol. 710-11, unpublished), nor—as far as I have been able to determine—elsewhere in the haphazardly arranged Fondo Bianchini.

So when did it get put "under the porch"? Is there any reason to jump to the conclusion that it lay there since the early Christian era? Or maybe there's a cave or cellar under the porch used for storage and rotated regularly with their wine supply? 😊 Maybe there is additional detail available on that.

Is this where the trail stops and we have nothing beforehand but speculation, or is there more?