

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Four - The Letter to Menoeceus 01- Context and Opening of the Letter

Post by “Don” of August 2, 2022 at 9:59 AM

Oh, and don't forget the salutation. Here's my take on that ...

The beginning of the Letter to Menoikeus comes at the very end of verse 121 in Diogenes Laertius's Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, Book X.

Verse 121: Ἐπίκουρος Μενοικεῖ χάριεν.

"Epicurus to Menoikeus: Greetings!"

Ἐπίκουρος is, of course, Epicurus himself, author of the letter.

Μενοικεῖ

Next comes the name of the recipient - Μενοικεύς (Menoikeus) - in the dative case, Μενοικεῖ, signifying "to/for..." You most likely see the name of the recipient most often referred to as Menoeceus. This is simply the Latin form of his name. However, he was Greek! Menoeceus simply results from the penchant for scholars to have once felt it necessary to translate everything into Latin. We'll try to avoid that proclivity here and refer consistently to him using his transliterated Greek name: Menoikeus. I have seen references online that state Menoikeus was from Lampsacus (one of Epicurus's former residences before coming to Athens), but I can find no authoritative source for confirming this.

χάριεν

And finally, the salutation: χάριεν which can be translated: Greetings, Hail, Joy(-fully), Rejoice (as a salutation). As will be seen in 122e, this word shares a root with χαρά "joy" (one of the "kinetic" pleasures) and χάρις "gratitude, grace." See more at 122e.

Then, no other pleasantries. Epicurus gets right down to work!

It's important to remember that the letter is, unfortunately, without context. We know nothing about Menoikeus himself. We may theorize he was younger than Epicurus although this is relative to Epicurus's age. We don't know what prompted Epicurus to write the letter to him other than a desire by Menoikeus to have a summary of the ethical teachings of Epicurus. All we have, thanks to Diogenes Laertius, is the text of the letter. In some ways, this is beneficial in that this allows us to imagine Epicurus writing his letter to all of us.