

Episode One Hundred Thirty Eight - Letter to Menoecus 5 - Pleasure Part One

Post by "Don" of September 9, 2022 at 11:25 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I strongly suspect that the bread and water reference was one of his regular in-your-face hypotheticals that he COULD live perfectly well on such fare if he needed to do so

I don't think it was merely a hypothetical. I think he probably did live perfectly well and pleurably and intentionally from time to time on simple, everyday fare. Maybe even most of the time. To prove he could. Not hypothetically but empirically. He was surrounded by friends and students. He taught that your eating companions are as or more important than what you eat. He didn't need extravagance, but certainly wouldn't have gone out of his way to avoid it and wouldn't have struggled to put out a large extravagant banquet every day.

If I remember, there's a text that talks about Epicurus from time to time experimenting to see how little would still give him pleasure. He probably did try fasting to see what was absolutely essential to his finding pleasure in living. From Porphyry, at least, we read the Epicureans had "simple, available food" but we have to add fruit to the bread/maza and water at the very least. And cheese, we know there was cheese from time to time. So, the menu grows.

Porphyry, On Abstinence, I.48-: For most of the Epicureans, starting with their leader, appear to be satisfied with barley-bread and fruit, and they have filled treatises with arguments that nature needs little and that its requirements are adequately met by simple, available food. Riches in accordance with nature, they say, are limited and easy to get; riches in accordance with empty beliefs are unlimited and hard to get.

We also have Philodemus dinner invitation poem:

To-morrow, dearest Piso, your friend, beloved by the Muses, who keeps our annual feast of the twentieth invites you to come after the ninth hour to his simple cottage. If you miss udders and draughts of Chian wine, you will see at least sincere friends and you will hear things far sweeter than the land of the Phaeacians. But if you ever cast your eyes on me, Piso, we shall celebrate the twentieth richly instead of simply.

This implies to me we're going to get a hearty but simple, frugal meal on the 20th. Not meagre or stingy, but we know we're not getting udders and expensive wine. It's not a banquet. People will leave satiated not stuffed. Piso will celebrate "richly" because of his friendship with Philodemus not because of the food being served.

I was curious about the "simple" words:

αὔριον εἰς λιτὴν σε καλιάδα, φίλτατε Πείσων,

ἔξ ἐνάτης ἔλκει μουσοφιλῆς ἔταρος,

εἰκάδα δειπνίζων ἐνιαύσιον: εἰ δ' ἀπολείψεις

οὔθατα καὶ Βρομίου χιογενῆ πρόποσιν,

ἀλλ' ἐτάρους ὄψει παναληθέας, ἀλλ' ἐπακούση

Φαιήκων γαίης πολὺ μελιχρότερα:

ἦν δέ ποτε στρέψης καὶ ἐς ἡμέας ὄμματα, Πείσων, ἄξομεν ἐκ λιτῆς εἰκάδα πιστότερην.

καλιάδα = "simple" cottage; hut

λιτῆς = litēs = simple, inexpensive, frugal; of style, plain, simple, unadorned

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

Philodemus was also clever in his word choice because λιτὴν = litēn = *entreaty, prayer, invitation* echoes the λιτῆς = litēs = *simple, inexpensive, frugal* in the last line.