

# **August 2, 2023 - Wednesday Night Zoom Agenda - Vatican Sayings 16 & 17**

**Post by “Don” of August 3, 2023 at 11:32 PM**

From P. Gordon: Epicurus in Lycia.

writings are rare in the generation after his death, and we have none at all in sources contemporary with him.<sup>53</sup> This was not due to any interdiction by Epicurus against the dissemination of Epicurean documents;<sup>54</sup> rather it seems to be due to the difficult style and specialized nature of Epicurus' writings.

The generations following Epicurus' lifetime produced Epicureans who wrote for a wider public. Although the texts themselves are not extant, we have evidence for the industrious production of epitomes of Epicurean theory, especially in the third, second, and first centuries B.C.E.<sup>55</sup> It is widely believed that the composition of epitomes had begun with Epicurus himself, who wrote several condensed outlines (including the extant *Letter to Herodotus*) "for those who are unable to work in detail through all that I have written about nature or to peruse the larger books which I have composed."<sup>56</sup> Because the epitomes written by Epicurus' followers have not survived, it is impossible to know whether the epitomes attempted to present the philosophy to newcomers.<sup>57</sup> But our extant treatments of Epicureanism were clearly meant to do so.

Lucretius, Diogenes Laertius, and Diogenes of Oenoanda popularized Epicureanism and made it accessible (in very different ways) to a broad audience. Some of the works of Philodemus may also be regarded as popularizing texts, although they may not have been intended for general circulation.<sup>58</sup> Lucretius was unusual in his selection of didactic poetry as a medium for the promulgation of Epicureanism, but there were many prose handbooks of Epicureanism, as is clear from the nonextant sources cited by Laertius.<sup>59</sup> The authors of later handbooks made frequent use of anecdotes, poems, and rhetorical flourishes,

53. See Usener, *Epicurea*, 34, 68–70, 85–90, 342–43.

54. D. Clay argues that Epicurus actually went so far as to ensure public access to his writings by depositing them in the Metroon or State Archives of Athens (*Epicurus in the Archives of Athens, Hesperia Suppl.* 14 (Princeton, 1982), 17–26. Such a measure would be extraordinary (as Clay acknowledges), and the evidence for it is inconclusive.

55. One epitomizer cited by Diogenes Laertius (10.118) is Diogenes of Tarsus; evidence for others is collected by A. Angeli, "Compendi, Eklogai, **Tetrapharmakos**: Due Capitoli di Dissenso nell'Epicureismo," *Chronache Ercolanesi* 16 (1986): 54–55.

56. This is Bailey's translation (*Epicurus: The Extant Remains* [Oxford, 1926], 19) of the beginning of the *Letter to Herodotus* (Diogenes Laertius 10.35).

57. Epitomizers and Hellenistic doxographers are discussed by Mejer (*Hellenistic Background*, 81–89), who laments that we know "deplorably little" (86) about works on dogmas for which only titles have survived.

58. De Lacy ("Lucretius and the History of Epicureanism," 21), points out the characteristics Philodemus' writings have in common with popular philosophical essays. Since Philodemus' Epicurean works are known only from Herculaneum and are not cited by any ancient sources, it can be



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form of aphorisms. It seems improbable, however, that the entire collection of *Kyriai Doxai* was written as a forty-point creed to be memorized.

Nineteenth-century scholarship (mostly in German) rejected the ancient conception of the nature of the *Kyriai Doxai*.<sup>81</sup> Usener formulated four main arguments against the contention that Epicurus wrote the forty sayings and published them as a distinct collection.<sup>82</sup> First, if Epicurus had wanted to distribute forty “doctrines” he would have included all of his important ideas instead of omitting (as does the collection) references to the Canon and to physical theory. Second, the sayings are not preserved in any logical order, as would be expected if Epicurus had composed them as a series to be memorized.<sup>83</sup> Third, some of the maxims (*Principal Doctrines* 10, 20, and 24) appear to be excerpts from personal letters rather than succinctly formulated philosophical tenets. Fourth, there is repetition and duplication of sayings within the collection.<sup>84</sup>

These arguments are compelling, particularly the last two, which are based not on expectations of what Epicurus would have done but on analysis of the sayings themselves. The logical conclusion is that the *Kyriai Doxai* as they appear in the manuscripts of Diogenes Laertius represent a collection that developed around a nucleus of a few sayings of Epicurus. Perhaps the original nucleus is represented by the first four sayings, which by the first century B.C.E. were called the *tetrapharmakos*.<sup>85</sup> Many of the additions may be extracts from the writings of Epicurus himself (or perhaps from those of Metrodorus, Polyaeus, or Hermarchus). Others represent variants that developed in the process of transmission; by the time Diogenes Laertius (or his source) obtained them, the variations on several sayings differed enough to warrant preserving more than one version in the same collection.

Despite the objections outlined by Usener, English-language scholarship generally postulates that Epicurus himself formulated and distributed a collection of *Kyriai Doxai* like that in Laertius’ text.<sup>86</sup> Diskin Clay, for example, endorses that approach in his recent book on Lucretius and Epicurus, although he

