

Alciphron, Letters, Letters of the Courtesans: Leontion to Lamia (Fictional Epistle)

Post by “Joshua” of March 4, 2024 at 7:56 PM

This is an interesting document. The whole document seems to turn on the question of just and honorable authority. First, there is the connection between the names Timocrates and Timarchus.

τιμή- "Honor"

-κρατία "Power, Rule"

-ἄρχός "Ruler, leader, Prince"

In the story, Leontion shuns Epicurus for Timarchus, 'honorable ruler'. Timocrates, 'honorable power', comes to their defense. Epicurus, by contrast, is called Atreus, a king from a cursed royal House descended from the damned king Tantalus and reaching its climax in the aftermath of the Trojan war with Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, and their children; among whom were Orestes and Iphigenia.

Quote

The House of Atreus begins with Tantalus. Tantalus, the son of Zeus and the nymph Plouto, enjoyed cordial relations with the gods until he decided to slay his son Pelops and feed him to the gods as a test of their omniscience.

Tantalus' crime was partly murder, but also partly impiety. His punishment was to be vexed forever by terrible hunger and thirst.

Leontion calls upon Demeter to give her over to Timarchus. She chose the right goddess for the job, as Demeter, distracted as she was by the kidnapping of her daughter by Hades, was the only one at the table to consume a part of Pelops.

Atreus himself then repeats the evil deed;

Quote

Atreus then learned of Thyestes' and Aerope's adultery and plotted revenge. He killed Thyestes' sons and cooked them, save their hands and feet. He tricked Thyestes into eating the flesh of his own sons and then taunted him with their hands and feet.

So Epicurus is a stand-in for a bad ruler, from a cursed lineage of rulers, and a rival to Timarchus, 'honorable ruler', who has as she says the "juster claim".

And then we have the comparison of Epicurus and Pythocles to Socrates and Alcibiades;

Quote

Plato presents Alcibiades as a youthful student and lover of Socrates who would, in time to come, be the ruin of Athens through his change of allegiance in war.[6] Because of the high level of esteem for the community in ancient Greece, Alcibiades' betrayal of his fellow soldiers ensures that he is looked down upon in all of Plato's writings.

In summary, Epicurus is an immoral and hedonistic ruler from a foul and accursed lineage, a lice-ridden and itchy lecher and pederast, a tyrant with his pupils, a threat as well as a laughingstock to the people of Athens, and a dotard who speaks neither like a citizen nor like a philosopher, but like a clown.

He is, in short, all bad things to all people. As satire goes this is a job well done, and Alciphron has been compared with Lucian on that front.

Since the letter is fictional and satirical, we can dismiss without evidence what has been asserted without evidence.