

Other Epicureans: Dante Alighieri's Friend and Late Foe - Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti & Manente Degli Uberti

Post by "Charles" of November 24, 2019 at 11:21 PM

In my search for little-known Epicureans throughout history, some of the first and most enigmatic I had come across were the ones who had crossed paths with Dante Alighieri.

Introducing: Manente Degli Uberti, commonly known as Farinata Degli Uberti



A 13th century aristocrat who was the military leader of the Ghibelline Faction (supported the HRE over the papacy) within Florence, he was often accused of being a heretic. Though we have little information about his philosophy, his ideas, or anything else aside from his military accomplishments in retaking Florence and single-handedly, prevented its razing. It's still worth mentioning him, since the time period in which Epicurean Philosophy is perhaps at its most misunderstood, was during the middle ages prior to the re-discovery of De Rerum Natura.

In fact, 19 years after his death, an Inquisition led by the Franciscans investigated the claims of his "heresy" and they exhumed the corpse of him & his wife, and submitted them both to a posthumous execution. Later, he is found within Canto X of the Divine Comedy within the sixth circle alongside Epicurus & his followers. Boccaccio wrote in a commentary on Dante, about why Farinata was included in the Divine Comedy and the actions of the Inquisition:

"He was of the opinion of Epicurus, that the soul dies with the body, and maintained that human happiness consisted in temporal pleasures; but he did not follow these in the way that Epicurus did, that is by making long fasts to have afterwards pleasure in eating dry bread*; but was fond of good and delicate viands, and ate them without waiting to be hungry; and for this sin he is damned as a Heretic in this place."

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1290-other-epicureans-dante-alighieri-s-friend-and-late-foe-cavalcante-de-cavalcanti/?postID=5375#post5375>

* While this definitely isn't close to describing the life & actions of Epicurus, we have to give Boccaccio the benefit of the doubt here, as this was the middle ages and Epicureanism was nothing but a shadow of itself until Poggio Bracciolini re-discovered Lucretius.

Secondly, we have a banker and the father of a close friend of Dante: Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti

Cavalcante was a wealthy Guelph-aligned banker and alleged Epicurean Philosopher, whose son Guido Cavalcanti was actually a close friend of Dante. Not much else is known at all about him other than that he shows up in Canto X of the Divine Comedy in the sixth circle of hell. What's noteworthy about him is that his son, Guido; the famous poet and friend of Dante, was arranged in a marriage with the daughter of Farinata Degli Uberti.

I've always been meaning to make a thread about these two, and now that my living situation is a bit more stable, I think I can put in the time to share some more of my findings.