

# Tetrapharmakos: Alternate Translations and Content of PHerc. 1005 from Reviews

Post by “Don” of March 20, 2020 at 8:50 AM

Have you seen this:

<http://mediterraneanetworks.weebly.com/exclusive-phil...epicureans.html>

I have no idea who this person is, but it appears they're quoting directly from PHerc 1005 using their own translation (as they state), presumably using those images of the manuscript online or using Angeli's transcription possibly. [Here's the About page for the website](#) (university students created the site?).

The intriguing excerpt that jumped out at me about the content of PHerc 1005 was:

## Quote

Philodemus is outraged by certain Epicureans who had not read complete texts by the founder, but only summaries:

ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐγνωσμένος ἢ καὶ διστορημένος ὑπ' ἡμῶν, ὃς καὶ φησι εἶν[α] ὁ γνήσιος ἀναγνώ[σ]της ἐπὶ γραφᾶς [ἐγλεκ]τὰς καὶ [πλ]ήθη συγγρα[μμ]μάτων, κἂν βάλῃ [γ]ε [κα]λῶς, ἀνείληφε πολ[λὰ]ς ἐγλογὰς καὶ τῶν μ[ε]ν ἐπὶ μέρος διανο[η]μάτων ἀπειρότατός ἐστιν. ἃ δὲ προστάττεται ποιεῖν, ἐπὶ κεφάλαι[α] βλέ[π]ει, καθάπερ ὄν λ[έ]γουσιν ἐκ βυβλίου κυβ[ερνήτ]ην καὶ διὰ παντ[ός] - - -]

*He who claims to know us and to be instructed by us, who claims to be a genuine reader of various writings and of complete books, even if he says something correctly, he has only memorized various quotations and does not know the multitude of our thoughts. What he has to do, he looks up in summaries, like people who believe that they [can learn to be] steersman from books and [can cross every ocean].*

Phil. PHerc. 1005 Col. 4.2-18. The text in the brackets is my own attempt to fill in the gaps in the papyrus. All translations on this page are my own.

It is not possible, Philodemus argues, to be a decent philosopher without reading the founder's original texts, in the same way that nobody can learn to steer a ship without practical experience. Somewhat ironically, Philodemus tries to encourage people to read the original texts with an example where reading lots of books is counteractive. In addition, further in this text Philodemus writes that not reading enough is unforgivable for Epicureans:

ἀλλὰ τὸ σχετλιώτατον ἐκεῖν ἐστὶν [ἐ]πὶ τοῖς πλείοσιν τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ὃ τὴν ἐν τοῖς βιβλί[οις ἀ]νεργησίαν ἀπαραίτητον ποιεῖ...

*but the most shocking thing of most Epicureans is the unforgivable inactivity in regards to the books...*

Phil. PHerc. 1005 col. 14.13-18.

Philodemus is not satisfied with second-hand knowledge of the doctrine. For him, it is a requirement that every Epicurean is well-versed in the writings of their master: these are, after all, the ties that bind the community together. According to Philodemus, someone cannot be an Epicurean if he has not read the founding texts. This attitude would have dire consequences: books were expensive in antiquity, and aside from the writings of Amfinius (which, according to Cicero, were not of any value), there were no philosophical texts in Latin. It was necessary to be proficient in Greek in order to read the works of Epicurus, if one was able to read at all. With these requirements, Philodemus was effectively excluding the larger part of the Italian population from 'his' philosophy.

An important question in this is whether Philodemus wanted to actively exclude the new converts from his philosophical network. Was he really worried that people who did not know the original writings would damage the orthodoxy of the doctrine, or was he afraid that the reputation of the Epicureans, including himself, as members of an intellectual elite was at stake? Would Philodemus have wanted the whole world to be Epicurean, or did he value being a member of an exclusive community? We will never be able to completely determine which it is, but I myself suspect that Philodemus was torn between the two. It is never possible to be completely selfless, but Philodemus was trying his best to live after the teachings of his master.

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