

The Wreathed Figure In Blue - Epicurus? Democritus? Someone Else?

Post by "Cassius" of May 23, 2021 at 3:10 PM



Post by "Don" of May 23, 2021 at 9:47 PM

Here's a new one:

This author floats the idea that this is Diogenes Laertius welcoming us into his Lives, in which he is writing:

<https://risingtidefoundation.net/2020/12/08/the...phers-explored/>

PS I'm not convinced by his argument. But at least it's another perspective. Having skimmed the articles 3 parts, he doesn't seem to include Epicurus which seems odd if we're using Laertius's Lives as the guide to the painting. Laertius devoted the final entire chapter to him!

Post by "Eikadistes" of May 23, 2021 at 10:26 PM

Laurel wreathes tend to identify poets, so this symbolic allusion would not have been an effective way to express Epicurus: If this Renaissance artist's intention were to depict Epicurus,

a symbol of poetry may not have been the first object an artist would have employed to identify an anti-superstitious proto-physicist.

For example: **Danté Alighieri** is almost **exclusively** depicted with a laurel wreath on his head. If the context weren't *Athens*, I'd say that "Danté" would be a pretty safe guess to identify the figure, especially with the cherub; however, Raphael would have been very familiar with Danté's slender portrait with sharp cheekbones and a pointed chin.



It could be **Lucretius**: *De Rerum Natura* was spreading amongst educated circles; Lucretius would have been correctly identified as a "poet", and, symbolically, Raphael would have identified Lucretius as a Roman male, who, by default, are painted without beards when contrasted with Greeks (unless a bust is known like Marcus Aurelius).

It would seem that Lucretius' portrait was, perhaps, **more** unknown than Epicurus', so Lucretius should be a more likely candidate for the identity of the the "chubby, non-Greek-looking guy" than Epicurus, especially considering that we have a tall, bearded, Greek man with something similar to a bowl cut, painted with a strong brow in the background, who is a much better candidate in all regards for Epicurus.

Though, I'm not sure that the cherub, helping the figure hold up the book is consistent. The cherub, working with a poet to hold an epic would indicate that the poem were divinely inspired. I'm not sure that would have been the right message for a book that opens with a hymn to Venus. Then again, that's the bottom-line of the entire painting: *that Greco-Roman pagans were on the right track to truth, but the wrong train.*

The identity of this figure will have to cohere with the following imagery: (1) a uniquely chubby character who, (2) is not bearded, (3) is wearing a poet's laurel, (4) their work is being supported by a cherub, and (5) their shoulders are being physically massaged by dark-haired, downward-looking person behind him. The figure is well-fed and tranquil, smiling as a companion massages their shoulders, the very stereotype of a hedonist.

Given **my** assumption that Raphael didn't know what Lucretius looked like, I think this character, *symbolically*, in terms of *imagery that Renaissance artists were regularly employing*

to convey meaning, better fits **LUCRETIOUS** than Epicurus.

Even if he had seen the cartoon of Lucretius' profile, it would still have been appropriate to make the choice to remove his beard and add weight to his cheeks, arms, and neck to emphasize the archetype of a Roman Hedonist.

Post by "Cassius" of May 24, 2021 at 6:00 AM

OK so he's the ONLY figure in the fresco with a laurel wreath. The suggestion that laurel wreaths are identified with poets would go a long way toward helping with the identity of this figure if we are confident of that association.

Post by "Joshua" of May 24, 2021 at 7:29 AM

Quote

OK so he's the ONLY figure in the fresco with a laurel wreath. The suggestion that laurel wreaths are identified with poets would go a long way toward helping with the identity of this figure if we are confident of that association.

It might...except that its not a laurel wreath! Bay Laurel is indeed associated with poets. But this is an oak wreath.

Post by "Cassius" of May 24, 2021 at 7:43 AM

Joshua does that appear to be a laurel wreath to you on Dante's head (above)? So the laurel is distinguished by somewhat pointed longer leaves all going in the same direction?
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurel_wreath

Is there a known association of someone/something with oak wreaths?

Post by "Cassius" of May 24, 2021 at 7:54 AM

Don -- I note in [that article you linked](#) this passage below. I haven't yet tried to get a timeline on availability of Diogenes Laertius' biographies but this would indicate "widespread" and extensive knowledge of Epicurean philosophy by 1433 - which I gather is approximately the same time Greenblatt pins to the "rediscovery" of Lucretius. That would seem quite a coincidence in timing, as if perhaps one fed into the other. I'm still thinking that there's little reason to think that DL (and thus the basics of Epicurean philosophy) was ever gone from fairly widespread circulation. If there was a single "encyclopedia" that a reputable monk or monastery would want in its collection, seems to me that DL would be it. (I'm trying to think like a librarian! 😊)

Perhaps, this is Diogenes, along with many others - some whose works are partly found and some that are lost, some old and ancient and some new and modern, and some who simply gave a helping hand along the way - as if they are all, opening up this book for us to read. As if Diogenes is the Maitre D, welcoming us into the dialogue.

[Note: A translation of this book was made by Ambrogio Traversi in Florence in 1433 and was widely circulated.]

Post by "Don" of May 24, 2021 at 8:38 AM

Yeah, I didn't think that looked like Laurel. Could it be grape leaves? [Joshua](#) says oak. There are three lobes on those leaves.

Here's a snip from WP:

"Different plants were dedicated to various gods: oak to [Zeus](#), laurel to [Apollo](#), herbs to [Demeter](#), grapevine to [Dionysos](#) and myrtle to [Aphrodite](#). Wreaths were also used to decorate the [hermae](#), stone pillars surmounted with the head of a god or distinguished mortal."

Another:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civic_Crown?wprov=sfla1

Post by "Don" of May 24, 2021 at 8:43 AM

Maple or common fig?

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 10:37 AM

I like the idea that it is Grape leaves.



Is this figure is an Epicurean, something indicating wine would be appropriate.

It could be Oak as well, signifying the Father God, and the source of Wisdom, thus, reinforcing the divine nature of whatever truth the writer is inscribing, helped by a cherub.



I am surprised that Raphael painted an author, receiving inspiration from a cherub, and chose **NOT** to identify him as a poet (with Laurel leaves). That may also have been a missed opportunity, and not the best artistic choice that could have been employed.

Or it could be ambivalent. Rather than specifically identifying a "poet", or "defender of Rome", or "brave soldier", it may just indicate "a Roman to the 16th-century mind".

Post by “Cassius” of May 24, 2021 at 10:48 AM

The thought occurred to me too that it could be fig leaves, but they look more like some kind of oak to me.

Post by “Joshua” of May 24, 2021 at 2:06 PM

The oak wreath is also emblematic of a certain pope Julius II, who was a patron of the arts at this time.

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 2:29 PM

JJ may have just solved it.



Post by “Cassius” of May 24, 2021 at 3:33 PM

You think Julius II looks liked the wreathed figure in blue? He does seem to have carried some significant weight.

Post by “Don” of May 24, 2021 at 3:35 PM

Oh, I think that's an interesting theory but I doubt Raphael would take a chance in poking any fun at Julius II. From what I've cleaned, he was a huge patron of the arts but also an irascible, volatile warrior with a short fuse.

Post by “Cassius” of May 24, 2021 at 3:42 PM

Seems that often Irascible volatile warriors tend to like to have their images preserved for eternity, however. I have no opinion at this point; that's the kind of suggestion that would take a lot of exploration.

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 3:44 PM

I think Julius fits right in.

He named himself for Julius Caesar, so between him being the Pope while this was painted, and him being an admirer of Imperial Rome, adorning him with Oak Leaves, placing a Cherub next to him, and having him carrying a book along with Plato, Aristotle, Parmenides, and Heraclitus seems to me to expression of respect or admiration, not derision.

Big picture, I'd be surprised if Julius II *weren't* in this. He would have been jazzed to have been included amongst the ancient philosophers whom he admired, and Raphael would have had motivation to patronize the Pope by including him among the greats.

Post by “Don” of May 24, 2021 at 3:45 PM

My money is currently on grape leaves. Plus I just realized he's not writing in the book, he's reading. The hand closer to his head is getting the figure behind him. Might be old news, but new to me

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 3:46 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I just realized he's not writing in the book, he's reading.

Sure about that?

[Screen Shot 2021-05-24 at 3.45.40 PM.png](#)

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 3:47 PM

Ah, good point. I see it now:

That hand is grabbing the figure's shoulder.

The figure, themself, is holding each end of the book. You're right.

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 3:49 PM

I'm curious why no one bothered writing any of this down at any point.

Surely bishops and Popes were as curious as we are.

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 24, 2021 at 3:51 PM

Plus, miscommunication between "someone being honored" versus "someone being derided" would not have been acceptable. Raphael would have made obvious visual choices that would not have confused his audience.

Suspicious that we are so confused at something that would have been obvious.

Perhaps, so obvious that no one cared to write anything down about it.

Post by “Cassius” of May 24, 2021 at 3:54 PM

If Julius is who commissioned the fresco, then portraying him in a prime location as if he is the one harking back to the books and smiling while he imagines the scene, that he is in actuality making available to us, would be a nice way to honor him.

Post by “Don” of May 24, 2021 at 4:45 PM

I keep coming back to the question: At what time did that figure become associated with Epicurus? As we've seen, it's not universally accepted (at least in the 1800s) but that's the majority opinion it appears today.

Post by “Cassius” of May 24, 2021 at 5:05 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

At what time did that figure become associated with Epicurus?

I agree that is an important question. While I know that science has improved over the centuries, I don't think we should presume that "knowledge in general" has always improved, and I would suspect that the further back in time we go the more deference ought to be given to statements from people of the older period, absent some reason not to credit it. I especially think that's true in terms of translations and interpretations - I would think that the further back in time the person is, the "closer" they would be to a more accurate understanding of subtle changes in meaning of words.

We have no reason to give much deference to monks of the 5th century on their general knowledge of science, but I would expect those monks to be able to run rings around later

academics in their ability to understand the subtleties of ancient Greek and Latin texts. Someone like Bailey or Munro can study a lifetime and be the foremost expert of their age, and yet still not have the accuracy of understanding of Greek or Latin that would have been held by many off-the-street ancient Romans of ordinary education.

Post by “Don” of May 24, 2021 at 11:34 PM

I don't know if he's supposed to portray Epicurus or not, but I'm pretty well convinced that this is a portrait of Tommaso Inghirami, the Pope's librarian, a friend of Raphael's, and one of the people that helped Raphael with his research. Tommaso was also named a poet laureate by Maximilian I which may explain the wreath: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommaso_Inghirami

"art historians credit Inghirami with authorship of the program for Raphael's frescoes that decorate the Stanza della Segnatura, which establishes a relationship between ancient Roman and Renaissance culture.."

So, it makes too much sense to me that Raphael would paint him above the entrance to the room. Then Raphael bookended the fresco with himself in the opposite corner.

If we're looking for Epicureans in Raphael's work: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_C...hens_\(1515\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_C...hens_(1515).jpg)

There's a whole crowd of Epicureans and Stoics to illustrate that Bible verse.

Post by “Cassius” of May 25, 2021 at 5:00 AM

Thats a really good point - checking out Raphael's other works for clues.

Post by “Don” of May 25, 2021 at 7:09 AM

| [Quote from Cassius](#)

Thats a really good point - checking out Raphael's other works for clues.

That's an idea, but I didn't mean to imply that for this painting. Just that that crowd listening to Paul has to have Epicureans and Stoics since that's who Paul was preaching to according to Acts 17:18.

Post by “Don” of May 25, 2021 at 1:40 PM

That being said, the guy with the crutch in the St Paul painting is obviously, to me, Epictetus. So, the Stoics are probably standing and the Epicureans are sitting.

Oh, this is fun!

Post by “Cassius” of May 25, 2021 at 1:44 PM

Do you mean this one? One point against that would be that he doesn't appear to be blind (?)



Post by “Don” of May 25, 2021 at 2:00 PM

Epictetus wasn't blind, he had an injured leg if I remember correctly. That's why he used a crutch.

Post by “Cassius” of May 25, 2021 at 4:04 PM

Good grief- where did I get THAT from? thanks for correcting me!