

Epicurus' Appearance - Research Into What He Looked Like

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 5:39 PM

ADMIN EDIT: There is a lot of material on this topic buried within the "[School of Athens](#)" subforum, but the topic is broader than the fresco so we need another place to cover all the facets of the question of knowledge of the true face of Epicurus. We can start with the obvious statement that those who knew him knew what he looked like, and it appears that numerous representations of his face were produced in antiquity and were reproduced for at least several hundred years. We also know that a small version of his appearance inscribed "Epicurus" was found in the Herculaneum digs. We can also presume that not all of the ancient representations of Epicurus perished over the years, but that is much harder to trace and would be the purpose of this thread. We also have to deal with the fact that artists in England or France or right down the street in Rome might choose to portray Epicurus in a speculative way, even though a bust with his name on it might have existed in some other place but unknown to them. We probably should not also exclude the possibility that some representations of Epicurus were intentionally misrepresented. So this will be the master post in this thread. The article by Takis is [HERE How Became Known To Is The Portrait of The Athenian Philosopher Epicurus - Takis Pangiopoulos](#).

It seems to me that the several most clear and important leads to pursue are:

1. The inscribed bust from Herculaneum
2. The inscribed herm from Rome (Maria Maggiore)
3. The reference in Frischer of there being a gem or ring inscribe Epicurus

Among the main resources by which to pursue these questions are:

1. [Takis P's article "How Became Known to Us...."](#)
2. [Bernard Frischer's Article "On Reconstructing the Portrait of Epicurus"](#)
3. [Bernard Frischer's Book "The Sculpted Word"](#)
4. [Bernard Frischer's Article "Semiotics of Epicurus' Portrait"](#)
5. [Pictures of Busts from Book by Richter](#)
6. [British Museum page on bust of Epicurus, with extensive notes](#)
7. Do we have something on Roman Gems?

[Cassius Amicus](#)

[March 7 at 5:45pm](#)

We recently discussed the location of Epicurus in the famous "School of Athens" artwork, and as part of that discussion it came to light that [Takis Panagiotopoulos](#) has produced a lengthy summary of the history of our modern knowledge of the true face of Epicurus. Takis has kindly allowed us to post the PDF in our files section, which I am about to do and will link below. However I want to be sure everyone sees not only the full article, which is excellent, but the attached modern portrait of Epicurus which is featured in the article, by Evi Sarantea. Thank you Takis for bringing all this to our attention!

[March 7 at 5:47pm](#)

[Takis Panagiotopoulos](#): "How Became Known To Us The Portrait of The Athenian Philosopher Epicurus"

[EPICURUS BUSTS 2017 en2-TK.pdf](#)

PDF

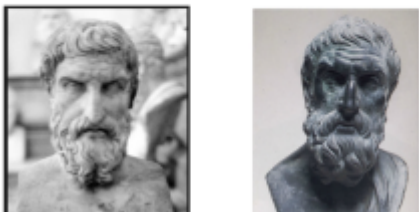
[Cassius Amicus](#)<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%...BUCghCc-SyEIDck>
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Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2021 at 6:42 AM

I am sure we have already covered this, but I will have to look up where and perhaps move the post. So here is the portion of Takis' paper, which I gather is based on Frischer, which traces the identification of Epicurus to the discovery of the inscribed bust in 1742 at St Maria Maggiore. What do we know about this "discovery?" Presumably it was not buried by Vesuvius, so wherever it was "discovered" someone put it there at a particular time. What do we know about how this bust came to be where it was 'discovered' in 1742? Is there some circumstance that would foreclose it being on display publicly somewhere at the time of Raphael or any other particular time for centuries beforehand? Not to trivialize this, but how do we know that someone who didn't like Epicurus in 1600 or 1650 or 1700 or even 1740 didn't just hide this away only to have it recovered relatively shortly later? I presume Bernard Frischer addresses this so that would be the next link in the chain.

The inscribed busts of Epicurus

The discovery happened only just in 1742 in Rome. During works on the construction of a portico in the church St Maria Maggiore, they accidentally discovered the first double bust of Epicurus and Metrodorus, where their names were inscribed (Frischer, 1982, p. 251).



How the portrait of the Athenian philosopher Epicurus became known to us — John Pousios/eposkios

The double bust was immediately placed in the collection of Pope Benedict 14th (The British Museum, 1836, p.14). This discovery was grand because finally the portrait of Epicurus and Metrodorus became known. As an aftermath, it helped identify the remaining anonymous busts.

In 1753 a second discovery happened, a small bronze inscribed bust of Epicurus was found in the Villa of Papyrus at Herculaneum, Italy, amongst the ashes of Vesuvius. In this way, we have conclusive confirmation of Epicurus portrait. In total to this day, thirty busts of Epicurus have been discovered, all copies from the Roman period of Hellenistic prototypes, as Bernard Frischer states (1982, p. 175), "After so many centuries, we met again the gentle character of this great philosopher".

Statues of Epicurus

Today we know of seven statues that depict Epicurus, unfortunately without their heads. They all have the same theme, the philosopher seated, wearing a tunic and holding a rolled papyrus. Just in 1912 it became known that these types of statues depicted Epicurus, (Bernard Frischer, 1982 pg. 155).

This is from Frischer's 1979 article "On Reconstructing the Portrait of Epicurus"

...the question of how the head of the statue of Epicurus was reconstructed. It is not only that the head bears no resemblance to Epicurus, but there is a simple historical reason why it could not possibly have. Before 1742, when the Epicurus-Metrodorus double herm with its ancient identifying inscription (Plate 7:1) was discovered beneath the new porch of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome (the herm is now in the Capitoline Museum⁵⁷), Epicurus' true image was not known.⁵⁸ The question of what head Preisler's engraving shows will be answered in a moment; now it is important to note that the discovery of a false head atop Ludovisi no. 243 (Schreiber) in 1732 can only mean that the statue was restored prior to that date.

Is it possible to determine what other restorations were made on the statue? This question is obviously important for our purposes because the point of departure of this study is the question of whether Preisler's right arm is ancient or not. To answer it we must consider the states of preservation of statues 240, 243, and 245 in 1880. Schreiber writes:

57. See G. G. Bettari, *Del Museo Capitolino I* (Rome 1741) 14; O. Buonaccorsi, *Lettere accademiche all'Accademia Etrusca di Cortona da un' accademia delle medesime nome la sua immagine d'Epicuro* (Rome 1744). I have looked at the MS in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana of G. Bianchini's 1750 report on the archaeological finds that came to light during work on S. Maria Maggiore in the 1740s in the hope of finding mention of the discovery of the double herm; however, Bianchini does not happen to record this find, possibly because his report is more concerned with architecture than works of art. See Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Fondo Bianchini, T. 74, fol. 289r, incorrectly cited as T. 75, fol. 285r by G. Bianchini in his otherwise reliable transcription of the report in *Boll. d'Arte* 9 (1915) 145 n. 2. The discovery also is not mentioned in Bianchini's discussion of the portico in the same report (T. 74, fol. 710-11, unpublished), nor—as far as I have been able to determine—elsewhere in the haphazardly arranged Fondo Bianchini.

So when did it get put "under the porch"? Is there any reason to jump to the conclusion that it lay there since the early Christian era? Or maybe there's a cave or cellar under the porch used for storage and rotated regularly with their wine supply? 😊 Maybe there is additional detail available on that.

Is this where the trail stops and we have nothing beforehand but speculation, or is there more?

makes the problem of identifying Epicurus' statue-type separate from and more difficult than identifying his head, especially since none of the statues now displays an "Epicurus" inscription, whereas two of the busts do (Richter nrs. 1 and 8). Moreover, the statue-type is not illustrated in another medium, as is the bust, which appears in profile with an inscription saying "Epicurus" on an engraved gem.² But if the bust is easier to identify than the statue-type, the balance is perhaps made up by the fact that the statue-type is easier to restore than the head because there are so few witnesses of the statue-type and so much less disagreement among them than one finds among the copies of the head. Artists obviously saw more creative opportunities in facial expression than in sandals, chairs, book-rolls, or even drapery. The major difficulty we face in reconstructing the statue-type arises less from the evidence per se than from the scholarly issue about what should count as good evidence.

To begin with identification, the statue-type is only identifiable as Epicurus on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Lippold argued that the identification of S1-5 and Dontas Γ and Δ as Epicurus can be made for the following reasons: (1) S1, formerly in the Ludovisi collection, seems to have once had an "Epicurus" inscription, which has since disappeared due to weathering; (2) many of the busts show the himation draped over the left shoulder, as do the statues (cf. B2, 5, 8, 9, 13, 17, 20, 24, 28, 29); (3) on the site of an ancient Roman villa in Tuscany were found S2 and a similar statuette of Hermarchus (securely identifiable because its head is intact), and it is logical to expect that Hermarchus, the second head of the school, would have been paired with his predecessor Epicurus.³ This last argument may be bolstered now by the important find of yet two more statues of the Epicurus-type (Dontas Γ and Δ). They were discovered in Ath-

2. G. M. A. Richter, *The Engraved Gems of the Romans* (London 1971) 88, nr. 438bis. We cannot be too grateful for so much inscriptional confirmation of Epicurus' iconography, since any single Roman inscription always has to be suspected of being a *metagraphe*. See H. Blanck, *Wiederverwendung alter Statuen als Ehrendenkmäler bei Griechen und Römern* (Cologne 1963) 3-24 (=pp. 11-25 of the second edition [Rome 1969]).

3. G. Lippold, *Griechische Porträtstatuen* (Munich 1912) 79.

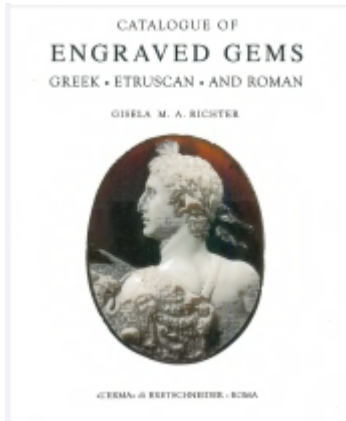
URUS do we? If so, what

Post by “Cassius” of May 26, 2021 at 8:17 AM

I will try to pull together prior threads, or at least links to them, here.

Post by “Cassius” of May 26, 2021 at 2:32 PM

So far I cannot find access to this volume, except for the attached table of contents, which would probably have the best info on a gem inscribed as being Epicurus



Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2023 at 11:40 AM

Youtube video of reconstructed face of Epicurus:

<https://youtu.be/lq5JvWUMJE4?t=126>

Post by “Don” of March 1, 2023 at 12:08 PM

I like that little smile Epicurus has in his animation. 😊

Post by “Pacatus” of March 6, 2023 at 5:18 PM

I recall posting this before somewhere: a facial reconstruction of Epicurus by Allesandro



Post by “Cassius” of April 17, 2024 at 5:50 PM

Here is a good clip from that video linked above, showing Epicurus more young and vigorous as he would have looked when he was starting out with his school rather than after he grew older:



Post by “Eikadistes” of April 22, 2024 at 9:13 PM

I just wanted to add to this thread **two** of my wife's reconstructions of Epicurus. She based those renderings on the attached picture I took of Epicurus' bust in the Vatican back in 2008.





