

Festivals or Contemplation??

Post by “Don” of January 27, 2023 at 4:49 PM

I have to ask a translation question since it came up in The Next Big Idea episode with Emily Austin.

Emily mentioned there that "Epicureans will enjoy themselves more at festivals than other people." While I like that sentiment, I've seen in some translation from Diogenes Laertius Book 10.120 the English word used is "contemplation" and similar words in place of "festivals." The Greek is θεωρία. My own take [on my website](#) was "The sage will also enjoy themselves more than others in contemplation, speculation, and theorizing,..." So, is it "festivals" vs "contemplation"?

I could see "festivals" if it referred specifically to state festivals like the Panathenaea or Mysteries since "only" the Epicureans practiced true piety and reverence for the gods. But the ancient Greek word doesn't seem to apply to that kind of festival, also including visits to oracles and the like.

I could also see "contemplation" since even Lucretius talks about Epicurus "traveling" in his mind through the cosmos and bringing back the truth of how things are.

Any thoughts are welcomed and appreciated!

The full notes on my translation are here:

[Epicurean Sage - ...enjoy themselves more than others in contemplation](#)

Hicks: He will take more delight than other men in state festivals. Yonge: ...and he will find more pleasure than other men in speculations. Yonge appears to...
sites.google.com

Post by “Todd” of January 27, 2023 at 5:37 PM

Your analysis seems pretty thorough. You have my vote.

Since either translation is plausible, and there is no other context to go on...I would say the presumption should be in favor of consistency with the other occurrences of the word in DL. Since he is drawing from disparate sources, that weakens the argument, but what else do we

have?

Have you checked if any of the "festival" translators offer a justification for their choice?

Post by “Todd” of January 27, 2023 at 5:55 PM

I forgot the decisive factor: as a wise man, I tend to enjoy contemplation more than festivals. QED.



Post by “Don” of January 27, 2023 at 6:11 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

Have you checked if any of the "festival" translators offer a justification for their choice?

Unfortunately, I haven't seen any citations or justifications for either "festival" or "contemplation." However, Bailey does give some background for each of the translation options in his Extant Remains:

6. ἐν ταῖς θυσίαις, 'at public festivals', and especially religious ceremonies. That this is the meaning Bignone has shown by reference

COMMENTARY. §§ 118-121 419

to Plat. *conv.*, *Epic. Rest.* 13. 1095 c, where it is said that the sage will take special pleasure in recitations and the Dionysiac festivals; we may compare what is said of Epicurus' own 'devotion to the gods' in § 10. Kochalsky perversely translates, 'he will specially have friends in his philosophical speculations'.

We also refer to LSJ for interesting citations of different uses:

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, θεωρ-ία](#)

I find No. 4 especially intriguing:

4. *Rhet.*, explanatory preface to a μελέτη, *Chor. in Hermes* 17.208, etc.: so in *Philos.*, continuous exposition, *Olymp.in Mete.*18.30, al.

in light of the use of that word in the Letter to Menoikeus in particular:

Meditate day and night then on this and similar things by yourself as well as together with those like yourself.

Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῆ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς <τε> τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2023 at 6:13 PM

Great question, but it seems to me every translator (Bailey? Yonge? Others?) use some variation of festival.

I'd like to see what [Elli](#) thinks of this too!

Post by “Don” of January 27, 2023 at 6:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Great question, but it seems to me every translator (Bailey? Yonge? Others?) use some variation of festival.

I'd like to see what [Elli](#) thinks of this too!

Not Yonge. Check out my notes link above:

Hicks: He will take more delight than other men in state festivals.

Yonge: ...and he will find more pleasure than other men in speculations.

Mensch: He will enjoy himself more than others at the state festivals.

It also seems the theōriai were often delegates to other polis's festivals or were ambassadors? Take a look at all the uses of the term even within Diogenes to mean contemplation, etc.

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2023 at 6:20 PM

Ok -- As usual it looks like you're doing great work Don.

Post by “Don” of January 27, 2023 at 6:27 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Ok -- As usual it looks like you're doing great work Don.

LOL. Please... Don't... Stop. 😄

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2023 at 6:31 PM

That certainly is impressive research. Were you able to track down what Bailey said about Bignone's reasoning?

[Epicurean Sage - ...enjoy themselves more than others in contemplation](#)

Hicks: He will take more delight than other men in state festivals. Yonge: ...and he will find more pleasure than other men in speculations. Yonge appears to...
sites.google.com

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2023 at 6:36 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

I would say the presumption should be in favor of consistency with the other occurrences of the word in DL. Since he is drawing from disparate sources, that weakens the argument, but what else do we have?

Following up on this, which one do we expect is the most consistent not only with other uses of the word, but with what we expect Epicurus to have more likely said?

Seems like a lot of people want to link the "public festivals" to comments about Epicurus' piety and his affection for Greece. That seems reasonable, but he obviously also found his greatest pleasure in study of nature and in pursuing his philosophy.

I tend to think the most "likely" thing for him to have said is the latter, with the reference being to the study of nature rather than pure "rumination." (How's that for a reference to our current discussions? 😊). That wouldn't take away from his 'piety' or his affection for Greece, but it would make him less chargeable with patronizing religious ceremonies with which he pretty clearly would have disagreed.

Post by “Todd” of January 27, 2023 at 7:05 PM

Based on this from Usener, it seems like DL's source is probably Epicurus' *Problems*, which he does cite as a source for another saying (per Don's website).

With this additional context, I'm now leaning toward "festivals".

(I'm assuming this is what the Bailey footnote referencing Bignone was referring to.)

[Quote from Usener](#)

U20

Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 13, p. 1095C: The absurdity of what Epicurus says! On the one hand, he declares in his *Problems* that the Sage is a lover of spectacles and yields to none in the enjoyment of theatrical recitals and shows; but on the other, he allows no place, even over wine, for questions about music and the inquires of critics and scholars and actually advises a cultivated monarch to put up with recitals of stratagems and with vulgar buffooneries at his drinking parties sooner than with the discussion of problems in music and poetry.
[cf. U5]

Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2023 at 7:40 PM

Here's something strange--possibly meaningless, or maybe not.

When θεωρία passed into Latin as theōria, it was reduced to a single definition: *contemplation/speculation*. *Festivals* was lost.

When I looked at the bibliographies of Hicks, Yonge, and Mensch, I noticed this; Yonge spent most of his translating time working on Latin texts, and he uses the word θεωρία in the Latin sense of *contemplation*. Hicks and Mensch, on the other hand, spent most of their time working on Greek texts, and they use *festivals*.

Do three trees make a row in this case, or am I just out of my depth per usual?

Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2023 at 7:56 PM

And then there are the obvious problems with languages:

I'm trying to get my bearings, but a bear bearing down on me is more than I can bear. Does that have any bearing on our conversation?

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2023 at 8:05 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

When I looked at the bibliographies of Hicks, Yonge, and Mensch, I noticed this; Yonge spent most of his translating time working on Latin texts, and he uses the word θεωρία in the Latin sense of contemplation. Hicks and Mensch, on the other hand, spent most of their time working on Greek texts, and they use festivals.

I am out of my league too but potentially a great observation Joshua. I haven't checked back on Dewitt's commentary on this but I am pretty sure that he uses festivals, and I gather that he too was probably more into Greek than Latin - because I've looked through most of his published articles and they are almost always on Greek subjects more than Latin. I seem also to recall that DeWitt often cited Bignone favorably. But it's hard to make firm comments on how much time these guys spent on each language.

Post by “Don” of January 27, 2023 at 10:30 PM

That's a good find, [Todd](#) ! I had to look up the Greek from U20:

Quote

Quote from Usener

U20

Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 13, p. 1095C: The absurdity of what Epicurus says! On the one hand, he declares in his Problems that the Sage is a lover of spectacles and yields to none in the enjoyment of theatrical recitals and shows; but on the other, he allows no place, even over wine, for questions about music and the inquires of critics and scholars and actually advises a cultivated monarch to put up with recitals of stratagems and with vulgar buffooneries at his drinking parties sooner than with the discussion of problems in music and poetry.

δι' ἀτοπίαν ὧν Ἐπίκουρος λέγει φιλοθέωρον μὲν ἀποφαίνων τὸν σοφὸν ἐν ταῖς Διαπορίαις καὶ χαίροντα παρ' ὄντιν' ἕτερον ἀκροάμασι καὶ θεάμασι Διονυσιακοῖς, προβλήμασι δὲ μουσικοῖς καὶ κριτικῶν φιλολόγοις ζητήμασιν οὐδὲ παρὰ πότον διδοὺς χώραν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς φιλομούσοις τῶν βασιλέων παραινῶν στρατιωτικὰ διηγήματα καὶ φορτικὰς βωμολοχίας ὑπομένειν μᾶλλον ἐν τοῖς συμποσίοις ἢ λόγους περὶ μουσικῶν καὶ ποιητικῶν προβλημάτων περαιομένους.'

So, the word used for "spectacle" here is θεάμασι Διονυσιακοῖς (dative of θέαμα):

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, θέ-α μα](#)

along with the Dionysia

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Δι^ονυ σ-ιακός](#)

Plus Epicurus's book Problems is cited: ἐν ταῖς Διαπορίαις

So, θεωρίας doesn't actually appear in Plutarch's passage. So, technically, both can be true: taking pleasure in festivals and contemplation. The be whole ambassador connotation of θεωρία still inclines me against reading that as festival since "contemplation" seems to be such a common translation elsewhere.

The Perseus translation of the patch Plutarch passage gives:

[Quote from Plutarch](#)

by reason of the inconsistency of what Epicurus saith, when he pronounceth in his book called his Doubts that his wise man ought to be a lover of public spectacles and to

delight above any other man in the music and shows of the Bacchanals; and yet he will not admit of music problems or of the critical enquiries of [p. 177] philologists, no, not so much as at a comotation. Yea, he advises such princes as are lovers of the Muses rather to entertain themselves at their feasts either with some narration of military adventures or with the importune scurrilities of drolls and buffoons, than to engage in disputes about music or in questions of poetry.

I'll say that "some narration of military adventures or ...the importune scurrilities of drolls and buffoons" sounds like more fun at a symposium than disputes about music or poetry. 😊

Post by "Don" of January 28, 2023 at 6:51 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

When θεωρία passed into Latin as theōria, it was reduced to a single definition: contemplation/speculation. Festivals was lost.

This is a great catch!!

Plus, check out the Etymology Online entry for the English word ****Theory****:

1590s, "conception, mental scheme," from Late Latin theoria (Jerome), from Greek theōria "contemplation, speculation; a looking at, viewing; a sight, show, spectacle, things looked at," from theōrein "to consider, speculate, look at," from theōros "spectator," from thea "a view" (see theater) + horan "to see," which is possibly from PIE root *wer- (3) "to perceive." Philosophy credits sense evolution in the Greek word to Pythagoras.

Post by "Don" of January 28, 2023 at 7:57 AM

I was curious to see what Plutarch was saying specifically what Epicurus was advocating for as opposed to "disputes about music or in questions of poetry."

So, I should say that it's not clear if Epicurus was actually saying one should **prefer** "some narration of military adventures or ...the importune scurrilities of drolls and buffoons" over the "disputes about music or in questions of poetry" or was being hyperbolic. Maybe he was talking

more about attending symposia in the first place. If you are planning one, don't ruin it with disputes about poetry and music. If you're going that route, you might as well go all in and tell crude tales told by soldiers and present crude jokes and "coarse, vulgar buffoonery."

στρατιωτικὰ διηγήματα καὶ φορτικὰς βωμολοχίας

στρατιωτικὰ διηγήματα (stratiōtika diēgēmata) = tales of/for soldiers or military matters. There's also an adverb form of στρατιωτικὰ that connotes "like a rude soldier, brutal" so take that for what it's worth.

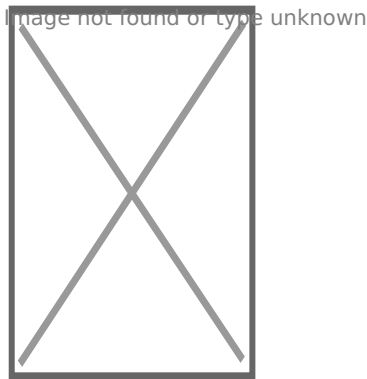
φορτικὰς βωμολοχίας (portikas bōmolochias)

Wikipedia: Bomolochus

In the theatre of ancient Greece, the bōmolochus (Ancient Greek: βωμολόχος) was one of three stock characters in comedy, corresponding to the English buffoon. The bōmolochus is marked by his wit, his crudity of language, and his frequent non-illusory audience address.

In modern Greek, the word refers to a foul-mouthed person.

Books and papers...



[The Boastful Chef](#)

books.google.com

<https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2016/406.Bomolochia.pdf>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23324452>

I don't know. Sounds like a fun time!

Post by “Todd” of January 28, 2023 at 8:51 PM

My take on the 2nd part of the Plutarch quote in U20:

Epicurus' point was probably something like: most rulers would probably prefer to discuss military strategy and laugh at coarse humor. If that's the kind of dinner conversation that gives you pleasure, then that's the kind of conversation you should have.

He's arguing for authenticity over pretense.

That's pure speculation of course.

Post by “Todd” of January 28, 2023 at 10:19 PM

If anyone is interested, I found the Bignone text that Bailey refers to, but it's in Italian.

[Full text of "Epicuro, opere, frammenti, testimonianze sulla sua vita"](#)

Search for "1095"

Here's a very rough Google translation of the Italian:

Quote

Whether they are public shows (including religious) is clear from PLuT., Contr. Epic. beat., 13, 1095 C, where it is said that according to Epicurus The sage more than any other enjoys the auditions and representations Dionylons- Siache; cf. also PHiLop., σv. ed., 76,1: Usener, p. 258.

Kochalsky instead interprets ἐν θεωρίαις as being the wise, that would be too obvious a truth.

— After these words there has been a shift in the text, of which there is clear evidence.

The Usener fragment he references is U386.

It continues on...but I can't tell if his discussion of the shift in the text is related or not.