

The Temple of Venus Genetrix

Post by “Joshua” of August 28, 2023 at 9:58 PM

Here's something far-fetched for you; in 54 BC, plans were made and construction began on a temple dedicated to Venus in the Forum of Caesar in Rome. Then in 46 BC Julius Caesar himself vowed the temple to Venus Victrix on the eve of the Battle of Pharsalus. However, two years later he re-dedicated it;

Quote

He eventually decided to dedicate the temple to Venus Genetrix, the mother of Aeneas, and thus the mythical ancestress of the Julian family. The Temple was dedicated on 26 September 46 BC, the last day of Caesar's triumph. The forum and temple were eventually completed by Octavian.

It is thought that Lucretius must have died sometime in the late 50's BC. At any rate a letter from Cicero to his brother from February of 54 BC mentions Lucretius' poem. Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, and Piso died in 43 BC.

I'm suggesting that there is a remote possibility that Caesar's Epicurean friends and relations (like Piso) might have helped to sway the decision. I would also observe that to vow a temple to a goddess of victory on the eve of battle, and then *dedicate* the temple differently after the battle was won would seem to suggest a somewhat lax approach to religion.

The temple itself was damaged by fire twice, and restored and rededicated for the last time by Diocletian c. 283 AD. The three columns that still stand date from this restoration.



Post by “Joshua” of August 28, 2023 at 10:11 PM

I should not be surprised to note that DeWitt mentions the temple in one of his articles, which is also useful for understanding the decline of Roman-era Epicureanism;

https://www.jstor.org/stable/283212?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

He points to Syncretism as the reason the school in Rome collapsed.

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2023 at 7:21 AM

Thanks for pointing again to that Dewitt article -- it contains what I consider to be very good analysis, and even sheds some light on our recent discussions about DeWitt's on views.

It is interesting that he labels the "Great Commission" as "trite," and that he says about Lucretius;

The wish is father to the thought, as Julius Caesar once remarked, and out of our great love and admiration for

Lucretius we are tempted to magnify his influence, but if his works had perished there is no denying that we should know little more than his name.

This is also an interesting statement about Lucretius, who he says "seems to have withdrawn within himself and to have become an unsocial socialist, dreaming of redeeming the common run of mankind by a work of reason fit only for the few."

More comments of interest:

"Somewhere about this date the Aetna was composed, the only poem that is composed entirely in the Lucretian

manner." (I realize he refers to manner and not to content, but still might be interesting to review "Aetna" at some point.)

"The lack of Stoic professors in the capital was remedied by the arrival of Posidonius in 51, who healed the quarrel between Stoic and astrological determinism, which had been necessary to the purer teaching of Panaetius." (That's an issue and a development of which I am unaware.)

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2023 at 7:26 AM

Here's the key point on syncretism:

This drift towards fatalistic beliefs was augmented by the growing practice of consulting astrologers, and received a smart fillip when Posidonius arrived to propose a syncretism of Stoic determinism and astral fatalism. The rivals of Epicureanism were swiftly combining to crush it. Its denial of the possibility of divination was being negated by a manifold practice yearly growing more universal. Its capacity for self-defense was simultaneously destroyed by the increase of gross hedonism under the same name. Between the Epicurean voluptuary and the Epicurean ascetic neither popular opinion nor serious legislation was likely to make a distinction. Julius Caesar enacted laws against both riotous living and new collegia.²⁵ It is likely that both of these resulted in the dispersal of the Epicureans. Vergil's teacher Siro certainly withdrew from the city, and his pupils probably followed him.²⁶

It was not the multiplication of its rivals, however, nor their combination, nor sumptuary laws, nor even the disorder of civil wars, that finally destroyed Roman Epicureanism as a distinctive movement. These were hostile influences, of course, but the real solvent was the irresistible Roman tendency to syncretism, which is much preferable to the term eclecticism. The latter distinctly implies the act of choosing, which is falsely assumed. For example, Posidonius did not choose out the Stoic belief in fate as an element of the Stoic creed which might be combined with astrology. The process was quite different. Practice preceded synthesis. The Stoic belief in fate had been held in certain Roman circles for a century. The practice of astrology grew up alongside of it. Syncretism took place in spite of the philosophers, and all they could do was to acknowledge it. Philosophy, like theology, often pretends to lead the procession, when in reality it follows it.

This process of syncretism, which in practice had been going on for a century, was abruptly and effectually, though somewhat prematurely perhaps, consummated by the philosophical writings of Cicero. The cessation of public life, which to him had been as bread and meat, threw him back upon the rich resources of his memory, and the death of Tullia spurred his mind and his pen alike to preternatural activity. In the two years and a half of life that remained he turned himself away from the immediate audience and synthesized the intellectual life of Rome for posterity. He hastened the syncretism that was all the while going on, and he absorbed the doctrines of all the schools into a composite fabric, not of true philosophy but of general culture.

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2023 at 7:32 AM

One other thing to follow up on at some point as to Horace:

To these indications of a general attitude a score of examples might easily be added to demonstrate his familiarity

with minor Epicurean topics. An outstanding example of this class is his exhortation not to postpone the decision to save oneself.³³ The identification of this topic as Epicurean depends upon a letter of the younger Seneca, who, unlike his immediate predecessors, dares to mention Epicurus by name, but apologizes for doing so.³⁴

³³ Ep. , 2, 37-43.

³⁴ lb. III, 1, 5-6; I, 12, 11 (Hense).

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2023 at 10:06 AM

Note -- see this thread I set up on Posidonius

Post

[Posidonius - The Stoic Astrologer](#)

[Joshua's reference to DeWitt's article on the history of Roman Epicureanism](#) leads to this, on Posidonius, the Stoic of Roman period (died 51 BC) who embraced astrology. This is of course relevant to Epicurean philosophy's rejection of all sorts of divination, traceable to Epicurus himself, but which position would have been more relevant if promoted by Stoics like Posidonius.

DeWitt Says:

[...]

From Wikipedia on [Posidonius](#):

Physics[[edit](#)]

[...]

The Wikipedia article includes that David Sedley also...



Cassius

August 29, 2023 at 10:02 AM

It sure would be nice some day to set up a full graphical timeline of people and their positions (both friendly and unfriendly) who are particularly relevant to core Epicurean philosophy positions.