

Book Reviews



Marco Beretta, Francesco Citti, Alessandro Iannucci (eds.)

Il culto di Epicuro. Testi, iconografia e paesaggio. (Biblioteca di Nuncius. Studi e testi LXXV) (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2014), pp. vi + 305, illus., index, € 34.00, ISBN 978 8 8222 6392 6.

Even during his lifetime, Epicurus was the object of a cult. In gratitude for his having paved the way for happiness, his school celebrated him on a monthly basis. Among other forms of devotion to the master, proselytism was also practised. It was due to the zeal of the disciples of the Garden that Epicureanism spread widely throughout the ancient world. Thus, any study of the cult of Epicurus necessarily involves an investigation of his reception in a very broad sense. The subject matter of such a study must not only cover Epicurus' philosophy proper, but also his public image, the places and times in which he was worshipped, and his most eminent followers and their works. This broad range is reflected in the structure of the book under review, which approaches the cult of Epicurus from an interdisciplinary point of view. It collects a series of papers presented as part of a seminar held at the University of Bologna in 2011, and further, additional contributions to the discussion.

Of the articles in *Il culto di Epicuro*, three consider the divinization of Epicurus and the significance attached to this process. Michael Erler documents how Epicureans saw in their master a moral example, as he had been the first person to obey his own ethical rules. In this respect, Epicurus seemed similar to Socrates, whose life and death had been a testimony to the concrete reality of virtue. Matteo Martelli claims that Epicurus was venerated as a discoverer: just as Prometheus had given fire to humanity, so Epicurus had regaled mankind by disclosing the laws of nature. Lucretius' hymn to Epicurus in Book v of *De rerum natura* conveys precisely this image. Guido Milanese, in turn, highlights a 'physical' reason for the comparison of Epicurus to a god. It was said that his rectitude was accompanied by an unchangeable atomic composition which endowed him with a feature specific to divinities: eternity.

Francesca Longo Auricchio and Giovanni Indelli both consider the ritual aspect of the cult of Epicurus. Longo Auricchio provides details of practicalities in Epicurean celebrations, which were characterized by the veneration of Epicurus, a model to be imitated. The emulation of Epicurus enabled the worshipper to achieve happiness. Indelli, in a brief biographical profile, examines Epicurus' relation to traditional cults. His negative opinion of the Greek classical religion notwithstanding, Epicurus participated in the main festivals held in the *polis*, thereby displaying his deep respect for social norms.

Epicurus was however not the only person to be commemorated by his disciples. Zeno of Sidon (one of the last scholars of the Garden) received the same treatment from Philodemus, as Gianluca Del Mastro demonstrates by identifying elements of devotion in the style and contents of Philodemus' works. According to Mastro, a rhetorical purpose lies behind the expression of the individual feelings: that of the identification of the Epicurean identity of Philodemus' school. Fabrizio Pesando's contribution is also devoted to Philodemus, specifically to his stay in Athens during Sulla's siege (87–86 BC). After the conquest, the Romans pillaged the city and destroyed a considerable part of it. Epicurus' house was also damaged, as Cicero recalls. This was a decisive moment for the history of Epicureanism (and for Hellenistic thought in general), as it marks the decline of Athens as the centre of the philosophical schools.

Jürgen Hammerstaedt and Maria Paola Guidobaldi focus on two other central areas of interest in the geography of Epicureanism: Oenoanda and Herculaneum. Hammerstaedt analyzes how the inscription of Diogenes of Oenoanda pays homage to Epicurus. The public location of the inscription reveals the donor's intention to make Epicurus' salvific message accessible to all. Hammerstaedt concludes that it would, therefore, have served as a powerful means of propaganda. Guidobaldi then considers the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum in the light of insights gained from recent archaeological excavations. The Villa belonged to the Roman noble family of the Calpurnii Pisoni and was built almost entirely at the end of the first century BC. It was named after its library, which was established by Philodemus and held a collection of Epicurean writings. The library survived the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD and is now the subject of papyrological inquiries.

Two further articles deal with the Epicurean who, by virtue of his poem, would be the one to contribute the most to spreading the philosophy of the Garden: Lucretius. Both authors tackle the problem of the reception of his work, from two different perspectives. Marco Beretta explores the world of the Lucretian iconography from the Roman Age to the eighteenth century. This allows him to underline the principal tendencies in the editorial history of the *De rerum natura*. Especially in the Renaissance, when Epicureanism enjoyed a

revival, Lucretius was approached with much caution due to the heterodoxy of his contents. Iconographically, this caution resulted in his representation as a poet, and not as a philosopher or a scientist. Giovanni Battista Pio, who wrote the first systematic commentary on Lucretius (1511), treated him in the same way. Elena Nicoli, on the basis of an accurate analysis of Pio's text, shows Pio's reluctance to criticise Epicurus' thought explicitly. Nevertheless, a certain sympathy for the philosophy of *hedoné* is evident between the lines.

Bernard Frischer reflects on his book *The Sculpted Word*, more than thirty years after it was first published (1982, 2006). The major subject of investigation in his book is the portrait statue of Epicurus of which we only have incomplete Roman replicas, and in particular, the original position of the missing right arm. Over the years, Frischer's proposed reconstruction has been called into question repeatedly. With this paper, he aims to vindicate his hypothesis and to rebut any objections against it. Fischer also introduces the latest results of his research: twelve digital reconstructions of the statue, which are now also available online (www.digitalsculpture.org).

The volume ends with a co-authored article on the figure of Epicurus in the history of opera. Sara Elisa Stangalino and Nicola Badolato address the two musical dramas in which the philosopher of Samos plays a role. In the first (*Glatomi d'Epicuro* by N. Minato), rather than Epicurus himself, it is his doctrine that goes on stage, dissolving the intrigue and thereby operating as a true *deus ex machina*. Epicurus' function is more difficult to establish in the second play (*Épicure* by Demoustier and Cherubini-Méhul), since the original libretto is no longer extant. Badolato is therefore obliged to propose his hypothesis on the basis of secondary sources only, i.e. on extant reviews. These evoke the image of an Epicurus strongly moralized, compliant with the intellectual atmosphere of that time.

Overall, this group of articles succeeds well in providing a comprehensive image of the cult of Epicurus. The themes that run like a red thread through the book ensure its coherence, while a critical number of shared insights connect one chapter with the next, resulting in an organic understanding of the Epicurean cult. Furthermore, its unified narrative renders this a fine introduction to the subject, suitable not only for experts, but also for an interested non-specialist readership.

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