

Epicurean Hetairai As Dedicants to Healing Deities?

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S EVEN WOMEN appear in the various sources as members of his School during the lifetime of Epicurus. All seven are stated to have been hetairai. It is a striking fact, but never discussed, that names of four of these hetairai are found in contemporary inscriptions¹ The four made dedications to healing gods at about the time the School was founded or soon after. The correspondences between the epigraphical and literary sources may be shown as follows:

<i>Inscriptions</i>		<i>Literary sources</i>
<i>IG II</i> ² 1534.27	Μαμμάριον	Philodemos, <i>P.Hercul.</i> 1005.v. 15–16; Timokrates in Diog. Laert. 10.7
<i>IG II</i> ² 1534.41	Ἡδεῖα	Timokrates; Plut. <i>Mor.</i> 1089c, 1097D
<i>SEG XVI</i> 300.6	Νικίδιον	Timokrates; Plut. 1097D
<i>SEG XVI</i> 300.9	Ἡδεῖα	(as above)
<i>SEG XVI</i> 300.12	Βοῖδῖον	Plut. 1097D ²

In addition, the literary sources list as living with Epicurus and members of his School the following women: Demetria (Phld., *P.Hercul.* 1005.v.16–17), Erotion (Timokrates in Diog.Laert. 10.7), and Leontion (10.4, and also, because of her intellectual prowess, in other writers).³

¹ The coincidences of names in literary and inscriptional evidence were first noticed by Professor Sterling Dow, who proposed the identification of dedicants with hetairai and suggested that I investigate the possibility and its implications. Although F. Bechtel, *Die attische Frauennamen* (Göttingen 1902) 66, suggested that the Mammarrion of *IG II*² 1534.27 was the Epicurean hetaira, there has been no subsequent discussion even of this identification.

² For the Herculaneum papyrus see F. Sbordone, *Philodemi adversus Sophistas* (Naples 1947) 89, 137–39. Epicurean material will be cited by the numbering of G. Arrighetti, *Epicuro Opere*² (Turin 1973), with references to Diogenes' *Life* added where appropriate. The comment of Timokrates (10.7) that the four hetairai lived with Epicurus and Metrodorus is excluded by Arrighetti from the *Life* and placed instead with the fragments of the letters (101).

³ We possess some further information about women associated with the School. Leontion married Metrodorus; they had a son and daughter. Themista and her husband

In both inscriptions Epicurean names occur in close proximity to one another. This implies that the women dedicated in sequence or in a group. These coincidences raise a fundamental question, first recognized by Sterling Dow. Are the dedicants named in these inventories in fact the Epicurean hetairai? Or were Epicurus' teachings regarding the gods (specifically their lack of interest and intervention in human affairs) so rigidly followed by members of the School that such dedications would have been unthinkable?

The evidence of the inscriptions is clear with respect to the names themselves. *IG II² 1534* is an inventory from the Asklepieion on the South Slope of the Akropolis. It preserves most of the record for more than two decades, and is now positively dated to the last quarter of the fourth century B.C.⁴ The dedications in question were made in 301/0. The text of line 27 survives as follows: [---]εν δ̄ Μαμμ[ά]-ριον ἀ[νέθηκε---]. Lines 40–41 are better preserved; the part which concerns us reads F F F F : ἀς ἀ[νέθηκεν]/Ἡδεῖα. *SEG XVI 300* is a partial inventory of dedications to Amphiaraios at Oropos. M. T. Mitsos published the inscription and, on the basis of the style of its lettering, dated it to the first half of the third century B.C.⁵ Lines 6, 9, and 12–13 read as follows:

[---] τυπίον· Νικίδιον τυπίον·
 [---τυπί]ον· Ἡδεῖα τυπίον· Θεὸν τυπ[ίον].
 [---Κα]λλιστῶ ὀφθαλμούς· Βοῖδῖον ὀφθα[λμούς]---

Of the four women in question, two possessed rare names. Of the four names Hedeia is the most common; in later years another woman of this name made dedications to Asklepios, recorded in *IG II² 1534.201, 262, 265, 287*. Boidion is only moderately uncommon; a preliminary search reveals ten occurrences. The name Mammarrion, though of a familiar type,⁶ is otherwise unknown in Attica. Nikidion occurs as the name of a Salaminian married to an Athenian (*IG II² 10204*, dated to the second century B.C.), but no other instance is

Leonteus, both of Lampsakos, lived in Lampsakos; she may never have come to Athens. The name Themista is not known in Attica. The other women associated by family relationships with Epicurus or the Kepos are: Khairestrate, his mother; Batis, sister of Metrodorus, wife of Idomeneus; Sande, mother of Batis; Danae, daughter of Leontion. In a study of Epicurus and the Kepos which we hope to publish, S. Dow will re-edit the relevant passages in the Philodemos papyri; the orthography given above conforms to the results of this study.

⁴ See W. K. Pritchett and B. D. Meritt, *The Chronology of Hellenistic Athens* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1940) 47–73, 76.

⁵ *ArchEph* 1953–54 II 161 and fig. 2.

⁶ L. Robert, *Hellenica* 6 (1948) 90.

known. The rarity in Attica of these two latter names at least leads naturally to the suspicion that the correspondence between literary and inscriptional evidence is more than coincidence.

Epicurus' philosophy denied divine interest or intervention in human affairs. Should we view the coincidences of names as mere coincidence, on the grounds that Epicurus would never have permitted such activity? Or could the hetairai of his School have made these dedications? If the latter is the case, their behavior demands explanation.

Among the abundant testimony on Epicurus' beliefs about the gods is the first Sovereign Maxim (5.I), that the divine "is never constrained by anger or favor." A similar denial occurs in the cynical comment "if god listened to the prayers of men, all men would quickly have perished: for they are forever praying for evil against one another."⁷ Epicurus warns Menoeceus (4.123) that the gods are not such as the many believe them to be. A purported letter of Epicurus to an unknown friend warns, "only be careful that you do not permit any admixture of fear of the gods or of the supposition that in acting as you do you are winning the favor of the gods."⁸ Belief in divine apathy was a fundamental tenet of Epicurean theology; the many surviving statements to this effect need not be adduced here.

Yet Epicurean piety appears to have observed a fine distinction. Although Epicurus, in accordance with the teachings just noted, expected no benefits from worship other than a general increase in spiritual well-being, he advised participation in traditional religious forms. Epicurus himself respected the Feast of Pitchers and the Mysteries.⁹ Philodemus attests in *Περὶ εὐσεβείας* (93) that Epicurus loyally observed the traditional feasts and sacrifices. He even prescribed that the wise man *εἰκόνας τε ἀναθήσειν* (1.121b [Diog.Laert. 10.120]). Various exhortations to Epicurean piety survive. The same work of Philodemus quotes Epicurus (114):

Let us at least sacrifice piously and rightly where it is customary, and let us do all things rightly according to the laws, not troubling ourselves with common beliefs in what concerns the noblest and holiest of beings. Further let us be free of any charge in regard to their opinion. For thus can one live in conformity with nature.

⁷ *Gnom.cod.Par.* 1168 f. 115^r; C. Bailey, *Epicurus, the Extant Remains* (Oxford 1926) 134 (omitted from Arrighetti).

⁸ *P.Oxy.* II 215.902-04; H. Diels, "Ein epikureisches Fragment über Götterverehrung," *SitzBerlin* 1916, 886-909.

⁹ 93; A.-J. Festugière, *Epicurus and his Gods* (Oxford 1955) 53 states that Epicurus here refers to himself. But since the letter (to Phyrson) concerns a certain Theodotus, it is not absolutely clear that Epicurus is not referring to this person.

In contrast to this ideal is the excessively superstitious religious activity which Lucretius (5.1198–1202) claims is *not* true piety: worshipping stones, prostrating oneself before altars, sprinkling altars with animal blood, and making vows.

Epicurean piety was not, then, contradictory in nature; as Hadzsits summarizes the attitude, “Sacrifices might properly continue—not, however, as a means of influencing or of assisting deity, but more nearly as an expression of admiration for divinity.”¹⁰ For Epicurus, the gods’ tranquillity was an ideal which men must attempt to imitate. Despite his prescription about dedication of images, Epicurus did not intend that one *expect* anything in return for the dedication. And although the dedication of *τυπία* by Nikidion and Hedeia might fall into the category of approved dedications, Hedeia’s four drachmai cannot be construed as anything but solicitation of the god’s intervention. Examination of the nature and procedures of the healing cults, moreover, shows that the dedicants could not, in theory, have participated in them while maintaining Epicurus’ standards of piety. Any votive offerings to Asklepios and Amphiaraos implied an expectation of reciprocity.

Ancient writers (*e.g.*, Aristophanes, in whose *Plutus* [633–747] Asklepios cured the blind god) and inscriptional evidence from the cult sanctuaries, especially those in Attica and Epidaurus, have left us abundant descriptions of the activities at the shrines.¹¹ A sufferer went to the temple (at Oropos one paid an entrance fee),¹² bathed, offered sacrifices,¹³ and went to sleep in the temple. During the patient’s incubation, the god (or rather the priest and his assistant in disguise) appeared to him and healed the disease or advised a certain treatment. After waking cured, the patient had to pay a thank-offering for the cure: a cock was the private citizen’s common offering (*cf.* Pl. *Phd.* 118A).

The gifts listed in the inventories which include our inscriptions were votive offerings, promised in hopes of cures. The god at times even participated in the process of the vow, stipulating a certain offering. *IG IV*² 121.68–70 relates that a boy came to the temple and the god himself asked what his offering would be: “What will you give me if I cure you?” “Ten dice,” the boy answered. Another time

¹⁰ G. D. Hadzsits, “Worship and Prayer among the Epicureans,” *TAPA* 39 (1908) 87.

¹¹ See Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius, a Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (Baltimore 1945).

¹² See A. Petropoulou, *GRBS* 22 (1981) 39–63.

¹³ According to Paus. 1.34.5, Amphiaraos expected his visitors to sleep in the skin of a sacrificial animal.

(121.33–41) the god ordered an unbeliever to dedicate a silver sow in memory of her folly. The general atmosphere of the healing cults should be obvious from these examples. Hardly any other aspect of Greek rite involved more hope of reciprocity and divine intervention, more expectation of *quid pro quo*, as each worshipper vowed an offering on condition that the god lay hands upon his body or intervene in the medical sense. We must conclude that these cults will have been repugnant to Epicurus.

Nothing suggests that Epicurus, who suffered from ill health all his life, excepted the healing cults from his condemnation of traditional theology. He wrote a work on disease (1.28), and Metrodorus wrote one on Epicurus' ill health and another against the physicians (1.21), but all these are lost. Health of the body was a requisite for living the good life. In addition, to judge from the extant fragments, Epicurus was fond of the comparison of spiritual trouble to physical sickness, and of philosophy to medicine.¹⁴ Several fragments testify to the severity of Epicurus' final illness; nowhere do we find approving or critical mention of healing cults, although during an illness he is said to have discussed philosophy and declined to entrust himself to the customary insolence of physicians (259). This accords well with the fragments of a letter to Idomeneus in which Epicurus declares that the severe pain of his illness is balanced by the joys of philosophical conversation (52). He felt that all physical suffering was endurable, as "that which causes acute pain has short duration, and that which endures long in the flesh causes but mild pain" (6.4). Among the attributes of the wise man is the ability to bear disease with fortitude (133). The frequency and intensity of his own illnesses do not seem to have led Epicurus to condone healing cults or even the 'scientific' medicine of the physicians.

Their gender would hardly have exempted these women from exposure or expected adherence to the master's precepts. No explicit statement assures us that those women whose names coincide with the dedicators in the inscriptions were full members of the School. In fact, we are not certain how the School defined membership, but those who attended the monthly banquets were in all probability members. Rist seems sensible in deducing from evidence in Philodemus that women were full members, in accepting the tradition of Hedeia's origin from Cyzicus, and in concluding that she and the other female followers except Leontion were part of the migration Epicurus led out of Asia Minor.¹⁵ Rist also reasonably distinguishes

¹⁴ Examples of such analogies are abundant, *e.g.*, 247 and 216.

¹⁵ J. M. Rist, *Epicurus: an Introduction* (Cambridge 1972) 7–10.

Leontion as an Athenian who joined the School after its relocation at Athens. Leontion was surely a full member, for Epicurus made her president of the School for a day.¹⁶ A hetaira of unusual education, she refuted Theophrastus in a book and wrote excellent Attic.¹⁷ In view of the School's reputation for coercing loyalty¹⁸ and the literary mentions of the hetairai as closely associated with Epicurus and with members of the School, it seems likely that these other women as well attended the banquets and were members.

The dates of the inscriptions might be thought to allow the possibility that the women made the dedications before they accepted the teachings of Epicurus. The dedications to Asklepios were made in 301/0; there is greater latitude in dating those to Amphiaraos, which might have been made at any time from the end of the fourth century to around 250 B.C. The School was founded in 304, according to Ariston (1.14 [Diog.Laert. 10.15]). But if the women were Ionian courtesans who came from Lampsakos with Epicurus and many of the original members, they would have been aware of his feelings about superstition at the time of the dedications.

If we cannot support the identifications with evidence that Epicurus would have approved the practices of the healing cults or that women associates were excused from the School's rules of conduct, we can support them by appealing to evidence of Epicurus' attitude towards errant students. Once the women had made the dedications, they would have found indulgence and forgiveness on the return to the Kepos. Such a conclusion is supported by fragments of Philodemos' *Περὶ παρρησίας*.¹⁹ From these we learn that the spirit of *φιλία* extended to correction of disciples' misdemeanors. Correction was not to be applied for all offenses; it was to be applied sympathetically and without insult or abuse.²⁰ Even those members of the School more advanced in reasoning than the students—and possibly hetairai other than Leontion belonged in this group—were allowed to make mistakes from time to time.²¹

¹⁶ C. Jensen, "Ein neuer Brief Epikurs," *AbhGöttingen* N.S. III 5 (1933) 12ff, 45ff: Asklepios reassures Epicurus against Timokrates' criticism of his appointment of Leontion to this office (the letter is apparently from Epicurus to Idomeneus on the subject of pride). Cf. Festugière (*supra* n.9) 43 n.18.

¹⁷ Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.93, *Orat.* 151; Plin. *HN praef.* 29.

¹⁸ E.g., Sen. *Ep.* 25.5, *sic fac omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus*.

¹⁹ Ed. A. Olivieri (Leipzig 1914). Cf. the analysis by N. W. De Witt, "Organization and Procedure in Epicurean Groups," *CP* 31 (1936) 205–11. Although De Witt's conclusions on the organization of Epicurean groups have not found wide acceptance, the fragments are clear in their urging of forgiveness and indulgence for errant pupils.

²⁰ 79.4–11 Olivieri; De Witt (*supra* n.19) 209.

²¹ 56.1–3 Olivieri; De Witt (*supra* n.19) 208–09.

In sum, it would be naïve to reject the proposed identifications on the grounds that Epicurean theology was in principle at odds with the practices of the healing sanctuaries. These cults surely embodied for Epicurus the worst aspects of traditional religion. But the realistic assumption is that deviations from the path to wisdom were expected, that Epicureans who contemplated error knew that indulgence and sympathetic correction would await them. The latitude in the circumstances surrounding the dedications and in the Epicurean philosophy itself allows acceptance of the identifications.²²

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