



## Summary :

The entry deals with the spread of the Epicurean philosophy to Asia Minor and the establishment of philosophical schools. Significant evidence, such as the big inscription at Oenoanda, and written sources certify the influential presence of the Epicurean philosophy in Asia Minor.

## Date

2nd century BC

## Geographical Location

Asia Minor

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## 1. The Beginning of the Epicurean Philosophy

The Epicurean philosophy was spread to Asia Minor by Epicurus, who, according to Diogenes Laërtius,<sup>1</sup> spent some years in [Colophon](#), while later founded his own school of philosophy first in Mytilene and then in [Lampsacus](#).<sup>2</sup> However, nothing else is known about those schools. On the strength of the following information it may be concluded that Epicurean communities were formed in some Asia Minor cities: First, there is significant evidence from the 2nd century AD provided by both Diogenes from Oenoanda and [Lucian](#) concerning the existence of such communities. Second, the Epicurean philosophy was generally widespread in the Mediterranean, with most important centres being Rome, Naples, Herculaneum of Italy, Rhodes, Cyprus and Syria. Epicurean Philodemus, whose texts were found on scrolls in Herculaneum, was from Gadara, which he left in order to study the Epicurean philosophy by [Zeno](#) from Sidon. His texts enriched significantly our knowledge of the Epicurean philosophy.

## 2. Evidence

The most important preserved sources are provided by Diogenes and Lucian from the 2nd century AD and are somehow mutually complementary. In particular, on the one hand it is the big inscription of Diogenes gradually discovered between 1884 and 1895 in [Oenoanda](#) by the French Archaeological School, while subsequent important discoveries were made in 1969-1983 by the last and main publisher of the inscription today, Martin Ferguson Smith.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the relative evidence provided by Lucian is included in his work *Alexander or the False Prophet*. Both sources certify the active presence of the Epicurean philosophy in Asia Minor.

The inscription discovered in Oenoanda is a unique monument in every aspect. It is a sizeable inscription that covered a wall almost 80 m and was positioned in a place easily accessible to the citizens of Oenoanda. It was written on three levels, which corresponded to three main dissertations or units. The lowest level accommodates an ethology dealing with issues such as pleasure and pain, fear, human desires and the role of their satisfaction so that the person could experience utmost bliss. The next level includes a list of the main Epicurean doctrines. Finally, the upper level of the inscription includes a dissertation on Physics and preserves an evaluation made by opponents of the Epicurean tendency in philosophical schools with respect to issues about the theory of knowledge, the beginning of language and astronomical phenomena. Above these three units there were some more doctrines as well as letters of Epicurus, letters of Diogenes to his Epicurean friends and a quite interesting advocacy of the latter end by Diogenes.<sup>4</sup>

The question is why Diogenes carved this inscription in his birthplace. According to his explanation included in the introduction of the dissertation on Physics, he wishes to help all those who have formed a wrong opinion on things because they are ignorant of the Epicurean philosophy. Diogenes considers this wrong opinion as a disease of the soul, while he intends to play the role of the 'saviour' who uses the Epicurean philosophy as remedy.<sup>5</sup> It is a metaphor frequently found in the Hellenistic philosophy, quite popular among the Epicureans.<sup>6</sup> The implication of the metaphor is obvious taking into account that our opinions on things are the causes that



produce strong emotions, which are frequently very close to some mental disease. For example, someone is very much afraid of failure or disease because they believe that success and health are very important factors in human happiness. This is exactly the view explaining why the metaphor describing philosophy as a remedy is popular in the Hellenistic period, when the discussion about the role of 'passions' is heated.<sup>7</sup> Diogenes publicised his views through the inscription because, as he says, there are so many 'sufferers' in his city that he cannot worry about each one separately, while he thinks that his inscription may be helpful for future generations as well.<sup>8</sup> However, Diogenes differentiates from philosophical tradition because he presents himself as the 'saviour' of his fellow citizens and Epicurus as the 'preacher' of this salvation.<sup>9</sup>

The motives of Diogenes behind the inscription must have been both the spread of the Epicurean philosophy and the opposition to his contemporary philosophical schools with which the Epicureans competed, mainly the Stoa, which was a tough opponent of the Epicureans from the moment their school was founded until the 2nd century AD, as indicated by the fact that the place Diogenes selected to put up his inscription was a stoa.<sup>10</sup> This tendency is confirmed by the text of the inscription, where Diogenes very often criticises the views of other philosophical schools.<sup>11</sup> In the years of Diogenes there was a marked revival of interest in philosophy as well as correlative tension among the philosophical schools of Antiquity. Both phenomena are evidenced by information provided by mainly Platonic philosophers, such as Plutarch, Taurus, Numenius, Atticus and Lucius Apuleius, as well as [peripatetic philosophers](#) like Adrastus and particularly [Alexander of Aphrodisias](#). More specifically, the Epicureans, both from the beginning with Epicurus and later with his successors [Metrodorus](#) and Hermarchus, are famous for their numerous and impassioned letters against Plato, Aristotle and the stoics, while Philodemus represented later almost the same tendency. This tradition was continued by Diogenes.

However, Diogenes does not seem to express just himself but also a community of Epicureans he belongs to. This is evidenced by the fact that, apart from relatives and intimates, he mainly addresses 'friends',<sup>12</sup> that is, Epicurean peers,<sup>13</sup> while elsewhere he addresses his companions describing them as 'beatific', like Epicurus, and reports the virtues of the philosopher they have.<sup>14</sup> What is more, he reports an Epicurean, whose name is partly preserved ('Avi...'). Clay suggests that he should be identified with Avitus, who is reported by Apuleius<sup>15</sup> and Lucian.<sup>16</sup> Avitus was a Roman eparch in both [Bithynia](#) and [Pontus](#).<sup>17</sup> Smith doubted this supposition for reasons of chronology, as he believes that Diogenes writes in the 120s AD and, as a result, Avitus could not have been his contemporary.<sup>18</sup> In the same text Diogenes also refers to another companion, apparently an Epicurean, called Niceratus,<sup>19</sup> who remains just a name. However, according to the above, it should be underlined that Diogenes is not isolated, but member of a group of Epicureans he seems to represent.

The evidence provided by Diogenes is not the only source proving that the Epicurean philosophy was widespread in the 2nd century AD and particularly in Asia Minor.<sup>20</sup> Significant information is provided by Lucian in his work on the false prophet [Alexander of Abonuteichus](#), Alexander the Oracle - monger or the false prophet. The writer presents the Epicureans as the main opponents of Alexander and claims that there were lots of them in Pontus.<sup>21</sup> According to Lucian, Alexander resented the views of Epicurus so much that he burnt at the centre of the agora the book including the 'main glories' of Epicurus.<sup>22</sup> It is worth mentioning that at this point Lucian underlines, probably ironically, that Alexander ignored that the book of Epicurus was useful, as it could offer the people peace, placidity and freedom, thus freeing them from irrational fears, vain hopes and futile wishes, and lead them to truth and development of the mind by using reason, honesty and self-confidence.

An inscription discovered in [Rhodiapolis](#), a city almost 80 km to the SE of Oenoanda, provides evidence about the influential presence of the Epicurean philosophy in Asia Minor. The inscription dating from the 2nd century AD,<sup>23</sup> which was found in an altar, says that the council, the citizens and the senate of the city decided to honour the physician and philosopher Heraclitus, priest of [Asclepius](#) and Hygeia. Among those honouring Heraclitus were the Rhodians, the Athenians and the Epicurean philosophers of Athens. Heraclitus must have been an Epicurean related to communities of Epicureans in Rhodes and Athens.

The important presence of the Epicurean philosophy in Asia Minor in the 2nd century AD results from the general development of philosophy in those years. It is the period of a widely spread neoclassicism, which also resulted in the general turn of the educated people to philosophy. This turn is encouraged by Emperor [Marcus Aurelius](#) (161-180 AD), who financially supported at least one seat of philosophy in each of the four main schools of philosophy, that is, the Platonic, the Aristotelian, the stoic and the Epicurean.



More specifically, the Epicurean philosophy is supported by eminent members of Roman aristocracy, as indicated by the evidence about significant financial aid to the Epicurean school from Emperor [Hadrian](#) in 121 AD upon request of the widow of [Trajan](#) Plotina, who was a follower of the Epicurean philosophy. Inscriptions of both Hadrian to the director of the Epicurean school and Plotina to her Epicurean friends in Athens have been preserved.<sup>24</sup> An anonymous inscription dating from 125 AD and referring to the issue of succession in the Epicurean school of Athens has also been preserved.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. The Characteristics of the Epicurean Philosophy

Apart from the question about the spread of the Epicurean philosophy in areas of Asia Minor like Oenoanda, Pontus or Rodiapolis and taking into account that the particular philosophy was equally spread to other areas at the time, there is also the question about the particular characteristics of the Epicureans at this point. The inscription of Diogenes provides invaluable help in answering this question.

As it happens with the Epicureans of all times, Diogenes and his 'friends' feel deep respect for and attachment to the works of their teacher Epicurus. That is the reason why Diogenes is one of the most important and reliable sources of the Epicurean philosophy. The philosopher does not intend to present his personal views but the views of the founder of the school, while he often presents views or arguments that have not been presented in none of the existing sources of the Epicurean philosophy. This does not cast doubts on Diogenes as a philosopher. The content of his inscription shows that he is aware of philosophy and philosophical problems. The fact that he sometimes wrongly attributes views to ancient philosophers shows a tendency to fight rather than his ignorance of philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Diogenes, of course, is not original, but this is an extremely rare virtue in the field of philosophy and is not the essence of philosophy. The clever, well-founded, convincing and philosophically sensitive rendering of opinions of third parties, such as texts, earlier philosophers and teachers, is an extremely demanding yet fertile philosophical question, as proven in the history of philosophy by the students of Plato and Aristotle, the ancient and medieval annotators and, finally, the modern interpreters of the classical texts of philosophy. Diogenes appreciates the role of philosophy and does not hesitate to underline it. His inscription reveals that philosophy in his time was still an *ars vitae*,<sup>27</sup> that is, an art of living, which aimed to lead the people to bliss. As Diogenes represents the Epicurean community of his city, his attempt proves that philosophy in his time was still a political activity and a reliable and enlightening public opinion open to criticism from the citizens.

1. Diogenes Laertius, X.1.
2. Diogenes Laertius, X.15. See Long, A.A., *Η Ελληνιστική φιλοσοφία* (Athens 1987), pp. 38-39.
3. About the history of the inscription, see Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), pp. 59-75.
4. Although there is no doubt about the content of Diogenes' inscription, there is disagreement over their arrangement on the inscription. See Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), pp. 78-92.
5. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), excerpt 3, II-V, excerpt 4, V-VI, excerpt 119, III, 10-12.
6. Gigante, M., 'Philosophia medicans in Filodemo', *Cronache Ercolanesi* 5 (1975), pp. 53-61.
7. Long, A.A., *Η Ελληνιστική φιλοσοφία* (Athens 1987), pp. 110-120, 278-284.
8. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), excerpt 3, II-V.
9. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), excerpt 3, V, 14 and excerpt 72, III, 13. See Clay, D., 'A lost Epicurean community', *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 30 (1989), p. 326.



10. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), p. 123. See Neumann, A., 'Epikuros', *Realenzyklopadie der Altertumswissenschaft*, suppl. Band11 (Stuttgart 1968), pp. 580-652.
11. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), pp. 135-139.
12. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993) excerpt 117, 119.
13. About the great importance attached by the Epicureans to friendship as constituent element of happiness, see Long, A.A., *Η Ελληνιστική φιλοσοφία* (Athens 1987), pp. 120-128.
14. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), excerpt 70, II - 71, II.
15. Apuleius, *Apologia* 29, 94.
16. Lucian, *Alexander* 57.
17. Clay, D., 'A lost Epicurean community', *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 30 (1989), pp. 313-333.
18. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), p. 517.
19. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), excerpt 70, II, 5.
20. Gordon, P., *Epicurus in Lycia. The Second Century world of Diogenes of Oinoanda* (Michigan 1997), chapt. 2-3.
21. Lucian, *Alexander* 26.
22. Lucian, *Alexander* 47.
23. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), pp. 124-125.
24. IG<sup>2</sup> 1099.
25. See Oliver, J.H., 'An inscription concerning the Epicurean school at Athens', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 69 (1938), pp. 494-499.
26. Smith, M.F., *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Napoli 1993), pp. 127-130 about the opinion of Diogenes about Aristotle.
27. Cicero, *De finibus* 3.4.

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