Daniel DELATTRE (éd.), Philodème de Gadara, Sur la mort, livre IV
Paris, Les belles lettres, 2022 (Collection des universités de France)

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REFERENCES


1 Philodemus’ book 4 of the *De morte* (*PHerc.* 1050) is today available in many critical editions. The present one, which has been published by Daniel Delattre (from now on DD), supersedes in many respects the work that Benjamin Henry completed some 14 years ago (*Philodemus: On Death*, Atlanta, 2009).


3 The latter constitutes DD’s greatest achievement from the papyrological point of view. The scholar’s reconstruction (p. xiv-xxii and lix-lxix) starts from the *subscriptio* of *PHerc.* 1050, which informs us that Philodemus’ original text contained 118 columns. DD then provides a careful study of the order of the five separate fragments from the earlier part of the roll and their position in the papyrus. By combining this information, the scholar concludes that the continuous text of the later part of the roll that we can read today is made of 52 columns, and hence that it was preceded by 65 lost columns. This means that what has come down to us is just « 44% du *volumen* » (p. lxix) and only the later development of its philosophical argument.
DD’s other papyrological contributions include a detailed material description of *PHerc. 1050* and its different forms of transcription (p. xi-xlvi), a summary of its graphic/orthographic peculiarities (p. xlix-lix), a reorganization of a few columns of the inferior part of the roll (p. lxix-lxxiv), a table of concordance with the numerations of other editions (p. lxxv-lxxxvi), an account of the editorial history of the *De morte* (p. lxxviii-lxxxv), and the edition itself (p. 1-94). I would like to address separately the relation between the *De morte* and *PHerc. 807* (p. lxxvi-lxxxvii), which is relevant from the historical perspective. As Laura Giuliano has argued (« *PHerc. 807: [Filodemo, De morte, libro incerto] », *Cronache Ercolanesi*, 39 (2009), p. 207-280), the latter papyrus criticizes human attempts to achieve immortality by searching for glory. DD accepts her thematic proposal and does not in principle rule out that *PHerc. 807* may consist in one of the three lost books of the *De morte* (but cf. p. cxviii-cxx, where he prefers to base his reconstruction of these on the references to death found in the treatise *On Choices and Avoidances = PHerc. 1251*). Most importantly, his study lends further weight to Giuliano’s attribution of the papyrus to Philodemus, which is based on stylistic-lexical parallels with other Philodemean works. DD affirms that the few exceptions (i.e. the future λήμψεται instead of the vox Philodemea λήμψεται) can be due to the scribes’ hands, and therefore these exceptions are not « suffisante[s] pour en dénier définitivement la paternité au protégé de L. Calpurnius Piso » (p. lxxvii).

The rest of the book is composed of a summary of the Epicurean reflection on death (p. lxxxv-cxvii), an exposition of Philodemus’ *De morte* (p. cxviii-cxxxvi) with a discussion of its potential audience and date of composition (p. cxxxvi-cxxxix, cxxv-cxlv), and a study of the relationship between the treatise and other works that intended to remove the fear of death (p. cxxv-cxlv). Moreover, DD provides two different commentaries: the small annotations to the columns, which explain the editor’s philological/papyrological integrations to the text, and the *Notes complémentaires* (p. 95-160), which present other comments of this kind but also observations on the Philodemean terminology and sources.

Due to space constraints, it will not be possible to consider all proposals of this new edition of Philodemus’ *De morte*. Therefore, I prefer to discuss DD’s most original historical-philosophical contributions.

First of all, the merit of his work lies in the fact that he has studied not just the thanatologies of Epicurus, Lucretius and Philodemus, but also those of the Epicureans Metrodorus, Polyaenus, Hermarchus, Zeno of Sidon, Demetrius Laco, Diogenes of Oenoanda. DD adds v. 371-408 of the female chorus of Seneca’s *Troades*. In order to explain the evident anachronism present in the tragedy, *i.e.* an Epicurean speech uttered by women who lived before Epicurus, the scholar makes the intriguing hypothesis that the Stoic intended to « renvoyer la doctrine épicurienne à ses origines microasiatiques », especially considering its strong connection with the Epicurean community of Lampasacus (p. cx). I would have also added that Seneca may have wanted to allude to the fact that Epicurus’ ideas were described as “effeminate” by Epicurus’ critics (cf. P. Gordon, *The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus*, Ann Arbor, 2012). These contributions to the Epicurean thanatology are hardly remembered in scholarship. And although DD admits that those Epicureans – and Seneca’s *Troades* – offer nothing essentially new for our understanding of Epicurus (p. cvi, cxiii), nonetheless they deserve attention as an intelligent development of his theory.
What could have been included in this overview is a discussion of Torquatus’ thanatology preserved in book 1 of Cicero’s *De finibus*, something that could have been considered in relation to another topic studied in the book: Philodemus’ attitude to voluntary death (p. cxiii-cxvii). DD observes that he considers suicide « impardonnable » (p. cxiv-cxv). Yet Torquatus (Cicero, *Fin.* I, 49) and maybe Epicurus himself (cf. Diogenes Laertius X, 119b, and the maxim *in necessitate vivere necessitas nulla est* in Seneca, *Ep.* 12, 10 = fr. 487, 590 Usener) had a more nuanced view, for they admitted that circumstances can convince a wise agent to abandon life for preserving tranquility. If we take this into account, I think that Philodemus’ attitude toward voluntary death could have been included in the exposition of his « écarts manifestes » from the theory of his master (p. cv-cvii).

Speaking of the latter, DD follows Voula Tsouna (*The Ethics of Philodemus*, Oxford, 2007, spec. p. 258-264, 274-278, 285-288, 296-300) in identifying one of the major differences between the two in Philodemus’ view that human beings – including wise agents – suffer from the « natural bite » of the fear of dying, which means that this is an inescapable affect. Another essential difference is Philodemus’ use of non-Epicurean *exempla* for instructing his readers on how to overcome the fear of death, which is particularly interesting considering the general style of the *De morte* – remarkably elegant if compared to other Philodemean treatises (p. cxxxv-cxxxvi) – which brings us to the question of its intended audience. DD thinks that these elements indicate that the work targeted non-Epicurean Roman readers. Accordingly, he qualifies the *De morte* as « une sorte de manifeste épicurien » (p. cxxiv) that aimed to advertise Epicurus’ theory within a new cultural context.

However, DD’s most original proposal is that the Philodemean work « n’appartient pas au genre littéraire de la consolation » (p. cxli). The latter is normally based on the belief in the immortality of the soul and operates at the emotional level, while Philodemus’ therapy makes recourse to rational arguments and « évocations brutales » that do not hide that our self will be permanently destroyed, or that our corpse will putrefy in the open air (p. cxlii). Therefore, the *De morte* differs from consolatory texts such as the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* or book 1 of Cicero’s *Tusculanae disputationes* (p. cv-cvi, cxli-cxlii). DD argues also that the Ciceronian text may echo Philodemus. It follows that the *Tusculanae* not only are chronologically posterior (p. cxlv-cxli), but that they intend to transform the non-consolatory Philodemean arguments into a source of consolation.

DD abandons then Tsouna’s idea that the *De morte* searched for a *consolatio mortis* as well (op. cit., p. 240, 258-259, 265, 286-287, 292), an argument that is supported by Henry’s previous reconstruction of the columns where Philodemus’ reasoning seemed to be consolatory. The new edition suggests that these sections either do not intend to console at all and instead attack those who prefer a consolation over the crude but effective philosophy of Epicurus (col. 68, 90, 96-98), or that the few references to a positive consolatory attitude found at the end of the treatise (col. 113, 116) « restent plutôt marginaux », i.e. « sont présents... de manière discrète » (p. cv-cvi).

DD’s interpretation is well defended and should be seriously considered. At the same time, one should be aware that the columns where Philodemus is supposed to reject consolation are heavily integrated, which means that we cannot be sure of their content. Moreover, the columns that seem to have a consolatory dimension may not be so easily dismissed as « marginaux », for they appear in the end or *climax* of the treatise. I am inclined to find a middle way between Tsouna’s idea that the text...
provides a consolatio in the ordinary sense of the word and DD’s rejection of this perspective. Philodemus’ De morte could be a dialectical work that finds many faults within consolatory literature, but that also recognizes that its key goal (= the removal of the fear of death) is achieved by the philosophy of Epicurus. The Epicurean thanatology can therefore attempt a “scientific consolatio”, not an emotive or irrational one as it normally happens in this genre. 

In conclusion, despite some degree of disagreement, which is my way of engaging in a friendly philosophical συζήτησις, I hope to have shown that DD’s edition is a decisive milestone from the papyrological point of view, as well as a major step forward in our comprehension of Philodemus’ views on death, his place in the Epicurean debate, and his evaluation of consolatory literature. It is also a work that contains much more than what I have discussed in my review, as its readers will discover as they delve into its introduction and its erudite commentary.

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