

Epicureanism as the spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community

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The term 'early Christianity' is just a convenient anachronism that maybe we should avoid altogether. It was a merely a sect of Second Temple Judaism for a long time (according to some scholars it still hadn't completed the process of transformation into a totally distinct religion as late as the 4th century) so the question is if Judaism in a broad sense had a fruitful interaction with Epicureanism. According to the virtual Jewish library this was in fact the case. I quote the following from its article on Epicureanism.

'Agreements, however, both in content and literary form, between rabbinism and Epicureanism are striking: study for its own sake (Vatican fragment 45 and [Avot 6:1](#)); removal of doubt (*Life* 121b, *Doctr.* 22 and [Avot 1:16](#)); mortality and urgency (Vat. fr. 10 and [Avot 2:15](#)); acquisition of a companion (*To Menoecus*, end, and [Avot 1:6](#)); diet of bread and water (Bailey, fr. 37 and [Avot 6:4](#)); satisfaction with one's lot (Bailey, fr. 69–70 and [Avot 4:1](#)); and avoidance of public office (Bailey, fr. 85–87; Vat. fr. 58; *Doctr.* 7 and [Avot 1:10–11](#); 2:3; etc.). Epicurus anticipated Judaism's denial of astral divinity and rule. With the general rise of the lower classes he accorded human dignity even to the prostitute, an evaluation continued in the Midrash (Sif. [Num. 78](#); [Gen. R. 85:8](#)) and the Gospels (Matt. 1:3; 5, etc.). In Hellenism and Christianity, too, denunciation of Epicurus together with partial adoption of his ethics is frequent. The centrality of the sage in post-Socratic ethics and rhetoric facilitated such developments.'

Are we in agreement that Epicureanism was the first major cult that spread its message chiefly through the medium of epistolography and the first major school that envisioned a community of equals and friends without the mediations of political authority? Are we also in agreement that Epicureanism was highly successful in that period? If we agree on both then we must agree that it's at least quite likely that efforts were made on the part of Jewish movements to copy aspects of it. Successful movements never seem to fail getting imitated in some respects by their enemies for tactical reasons. The early medieval Byzantine heresies against the veneration of images (iconomachy) were likely a reaction to the massive success of the new Islamic religion and an attempt to imitate its strong emphasis on strict monotheism and opposition to idolatry. Such theological tendencies in the Byzantine east were of course not entirely novel but the vigorous appearance of Islam suddenly gave them a prominence they didn't have before. On the other hand, Islam copied the entire tradition of Orthodox chanting and phenomena such as the success of Byzantium against the Persians and the inroads of Christianity into the Arab pagan world must have promoted the growth of a new Abrahamic movement there.

Successful movements also have an uncanny ability to swiftly abandon elements that they were previously closely associated with if it suits them. Christianity became a religion entirely

distinct from Judaism only when anti-Semitism established strong roots in it. The process that led there was started when the Jews became so hated in the eastern Mediterranean after their failed revolts which had left entire communities of Greco-Roman gentiles massacred that Christians had to adapt by distancing themselves from their Jewish origins and accelerating the process of assimilating pagan traditions into their faith.