

Apion An Epicurean(?)

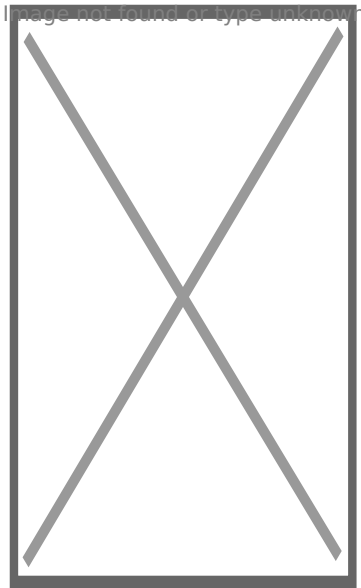
Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2024 at 8:01 AM

It's my understanding that there is not much left of Apion other than what Josephus wrote against him to defend Judaism against Apion's attacks, and that Apion is largely viewed in that context alone.

However it strikes me that if we consider that Christianity had not arisen during Apion's time, and that Apion was living at a time of great Epicurean activity, it would be logical to look to see if Apion was criticizing Judaism from what would amount to an Epicurean point of view rather than simply as a Stoic or as a generic believer in the Greco/Roman gods.

I gather for example that Apion criticized Judaism for being impious, and that sounds consistent with what Epicurus says about incorrect beliefs about the gods.

At this point I don't have anything more but I've downloaded Josephus "Against Apion" and see what I can find.



[Josephus; with an English translation by H. St. J. Thackeray, in nine volumes : Josephus, Flavius : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Translators vary
archive.org

Post by "Bryan" of January 20, 2024 at 11:22 AM

I found this article from Cambridge ([David Patterson](#)) that says that Democritus also mentioned the Jewish practice of ritualistic cannibalism. I have not seen this before in Democritus, but if he did, then makes Apion's connection to Epicureanism even stronger. I think Mr. Patterson is in error, and it is a different Democritus that is mentioned in the Suda.

Of course some aspects of ritualistic blood-drinking are still practiced openly, for example in the ritual of Metzitzah B'peh (not to be confused with simple Brit Milah).
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/safe-bris.page>

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 20, 2024 at 11:33 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I found this article from Cambridge ([David Patterson](#)) that says that Democritus also mentioned the Jewish practice of ritualistic cannibalism.

I want to dig deeper into this, because I was under the impression that Greek and Hebrew cultures did not interact until just after Epicurus' time.

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I have not seen this before in Democritus, but if it was true it makes the connection to Epicureanism even stronger.

I think that the author may have mixed up two, different Democrituses from the Thrace region. The Jewish Encyclopedia notes that the Democritus mentioned in a work by the Greek lexicographer Suidas was not Democritus of Abdera, the philosopher and atomist, but a different, unknown Democritus from Thrace (<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3408-...accusation#3489>).

Post by “Eggplant Wizard” of January 21, 2024 at 12:04 PM

I would be avoid taking at face value any claims of Jewish ritual cannibalism or blood-drinking or inferring that the metzitzah b'peh is a vestige of this.

Anyway the attitudes of Greek philosophers to Judaism is an interesting subject. Their dogged adherence to their own traditions was a cause both of exasperation and admiration. Among some middle and late Platonists the Jews were numbered among the wise ancient peoples like the Egyptians, Babylonians, Brahmins, etc. Numenius of Apamea (a major influence for Plotinus and Porphyry) thought that Pythagoras learned from Moses and famously remarked that that Plato was Moses in Attic Greek. Porphyry was very familiar with the Jewish scriptures and one of his sharpest criticisms of the Christians is that they abandoned the venerable Jewish wisdom tradition for a ridiculous novelty.

I do wonder how later Epicureans might have appraised Jewish tradition. I imagine the initial assessment would have found little of value in it but they also initially rejected Homer and the Greek poetic heritage and I think later generations were reassessing that.

Post by “Don” of January 21, 2024 at 12:10 PM

Excellent summary of the historical context! Thanks for posting.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2024 at 1:25 PM

[Quote from Eggplant Wizard](#)

I would be avoid taking at face value any claims of Jewish ritual cannibalism or blood-drinking or inferring that the metzitzah b'peh is a vestige of this.

Yes, pursuit of the truth or falsity of the specific allegations would not be the best use of this thread. The best use would be to pursue evidences as to whether the arguments of Apion in particular were being made from an Epicurean point of view, so we can consider whether we ought to include Apion among the list of ancient Epicureans.

[Quote from Eggplant Wizard](#)

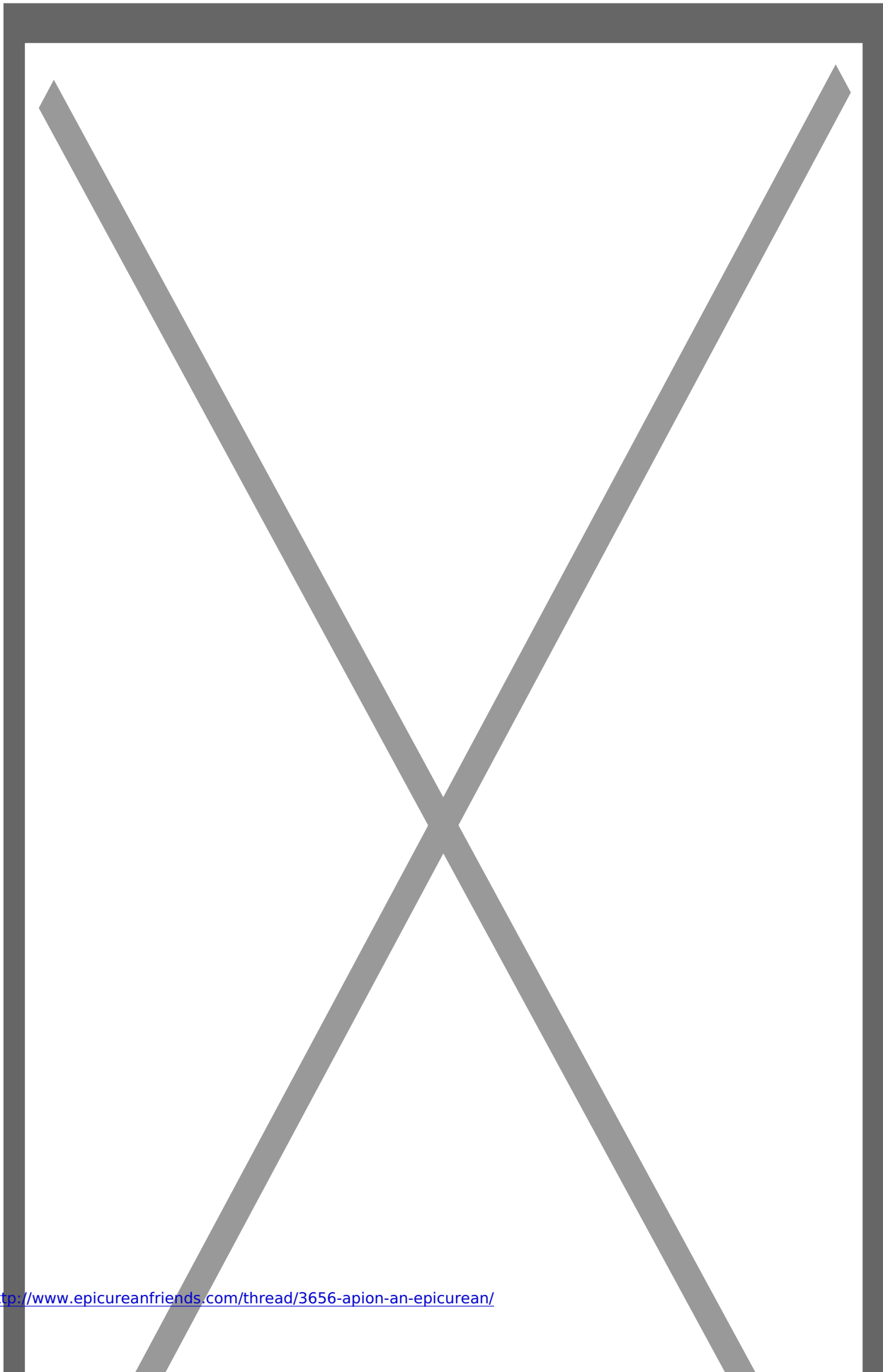
Anyway the attitudes of Greek philosophers to Judaism is an interesting subject.

And yes the entire spectrum of Greek philosophers may be of some relevance, but we ought to keep the focus on those who may have been Epicureans and what light the subject can shed on our knowledge of the Epicureans in the ancient world.

Post by “Bryan” of January 25, 2024 at 12:23 PM

I agree with Cassius that it would not be fruitful to peruse who is lying - Apion or Josephus. There are many instances of Josephus where he is proud of his deceit, which is for him a virtue when used as an instrument in his success.

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[Josephus problem - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

[Quote from Eggplant Wizard](#)

I would be avoid taking at face value any claims of Jewish ritual cannibalism or blood-drinking or inferring that the metzitzah b'peh is a vestige of this.

Even if we believe Josephus (who denies that Greeks were ever kept as prisoners in the temple and eaten), Josephus does admit to other instances of Jewish cannibalism, including eating children (although not ritualistically, but out of hunger) which horrified the Romans. For example:

[Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book VI, Whiston chapter 3, Whiston section 4](#)

"There was a certain woman that dwelt beyond Jordan, her name was Mary...snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said, "O thou miserable infant!... ..Come on; be thou my food." As soon as she had said this, she slew her son, and then roasted him, and eat the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. Upon this the seditious came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them, and withal uncovered what was left of her son..."

The idea that Apion was Epicurean is very appealing, but it seems there is no direct evidence.

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2024 at 1:00 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

There are may instances of Josephus were he is proud of his deceit, which is for him a virtue when used as in instrument in his success.

It's striking for me to consider that Josephus is open about how he came to cooperate with the Romans in the first place. To be a military leader in a tough spot and enter a Masada-like suicide pact with your unit and then decide to pull out of it after almost all the others were dead? It's hard to take *anything* such a person would say after that as credible where it concerns his own interests.

Post by “Cassius” of January 25, 2024 at 3:52 PM

To sort of bring this back to where the thread started, unfortunately I have not had time to read further into the Apion material to see what is implied about Apion's views of the gods, rather than of the people he was criticizing. I would think if we saw clear indication that Apion held "the gods" to be active and engaged in world affairs, then *that alone* would rule him out as an Epicurean. On the other hand if active engagement is conspicuously missing, and his references were to the impiety being an insult to the gods' blissfulness, then that would weigh in the other direction.

I would think that there is a significant chance that we might be able to glean some of that from a discussion of Apion's charges of impiety, but unfortunately I still have a lot of reading to do.