

Where Is Epicurus In The "School of Athens"?

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This reminds me of *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1834), a painting by 19th-century American painter Edward Hicks. He painted over 60 versions of the same scene over a span of several decades. Without unpacking all of the symbolism, you'll notice the abundance of odd-looking, large felines. Despite the fact that it was painted less than 200 years ago by a modern artist, he had never seen a lion, so he painted large house cats.



Despite living around Philadelphia in the early 19th-century with all of its intellectual resources, despite living on a continent filled with other large felines, despite a huge number of historical advantages afforded to this modern figure, it was **STILL** an **EASY** mistake for an American painter to simply **not** have known what a lion looked like.

While it is the case that "we would deduce that *MANY* people, even if not 'historical figures,' were familiar with [*lions*] in an unbroken stream throughout history" it just so happened that right in the middle of a time period **FULL** of people who were familiar with lions, here's an famous painter in Philadelphia in the 19th-century who was so utterly unfamiliar with lions that he painted oversized house cats.

Generalized deduction is not enough. It's just circumstantial.

Since this entire discussion is predicated on a physical piece of art, we are burdened with a necessity of finding more evidence in the form of other artifacts - rings, coins, stone inscriptions, busts, or portraits - to which Raphael would have had access.

Given the bearded figure's similarity to Epicurus in the fresco (*to the immediate left of Plato*), it seems **highly** likely that Raphael was familiar with Epicurus' bust, and transferred the face of that bust to this figure ... so it *seems*, anyway.

To which ring, coin, inscription, bust, portrait, or description did Raphael have access?

Suppose the possibility that Raphael wasn't intentionally referencing Epicurus; he was just reproducing the **unlabelled** bust of a Greek he saw. Not all of the figures are named. Raphael was a 25-year-old artist who did **NOT** spend his youth studying comparative Hellenistic philosophy. He was being paid by the Vatican Church to glorify the Eternal Divinity of Christ. This was a commissioned, Vatican project in the Apostolic palace, not Raphael's version of the Beatles cover of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, full of his favorite philosophers. Epicurus could have been featured *accidentally*.

Even still, we're playing "Where's Waldo?" with a Renaissance fresco. This painting was not created so bishops could play "match-the-face-with-the-name" in the Apostolic Palace. It was created to glorify Jesus Christ and His Church.

Epicurus doesn't need to be in the painting; it doesn't support the overall message of the commission. Placing him there would have been a subversive choice of the artist. That's a hell of a bold statement for 1508. It was a bold statement for Sinéad O'Connor to have ripped the Pope's picture on Saturday Night Live in 1992. *Like I said, it's like Rivera painting Lenin in the Rockefeller building. It **begs** more questions.*

The Church has a history of destroying artwork (and artists) that didn't support their narrative, so why would Epicurus have been allowed on a wall in the Apostolic Palace?