

Famous Epicureans Throughout History (Including Nate's Summary of Historic Epicureans)

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A CONSULAR EPICUREAN UNDER THE EARLY PRINCIPATE

P. M. SWAN

Pomponius Secundus /
I hope that I see him listed

“I HAVE DESERTED to the camp of my enemy Epicurus” (Cic. *Fam.* 9.20.1). Cicero wrote in jest: no one could doubt his immunity to the *inlecebrae voluptatis*. Still there were earnest converts to Epicureanism among his peers, for example L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (*cos.* 58) and C. Vibius Pansa (*cos.* 43);¹ and he made C. Cassius and C. Trebatius Testa the butt of persiflage for defecting from *virtus* to *voluptas*.² But the heyday of Epicureanism, at least as a faith for Roman aristocrats, drew to a close with the establishment of the Augustan Principate, which propagated a state-serving rather than an individualistic morality, and in the first century A.D. the senatorial Epicurean must have been a fish out of water. Still, Syme has cautioned that “the dearth of evidence may be deceptive,”³ and in the light of this warning it may be prudent to scrutinize a dim figure from the reign of Gaius—an Epicurean senator known only by the odd *gentilicium* Pompedius.

Josephus recounts, among the outrages of Gaius, the ordeal of Pompedius (Πομπήδιος) and his mistress Quintilia, an actress celebrated for her beauty (*AJ* 19.32–36). Pompedius, *συγκλητικός μὲν, τὰς ἀρχὰς δὲ διεληλυθὼς σχεδὸν ἀπάσας, Ἐπικούρειος δ’ ἄλλως καὶ δι’ αὐτὸ ἀπράγμονος ἐπιτηδευτῆς βίου*,⁴ was accused of defaming the emperor by a certain Timidius,⁵ who brought Quintilia as a witness and prevailed on Gaius to have her examined under torture. Despite her torments Quintilia revealed nothing to incriminate Pompedius, and when Gaius saw her injuries, even he was touched by remorse and freed both her and her patron.

Who is the Epicurean Pompedius? For several reasons I think he may be P. Pomponius Secundus (*PIR*¹ P 563),⁶ *suff.* 44, legate of Upper Ger-

Conclusion:

The high career of Pomponius Secundus contradicted Epicurean admonitions against political activity, though it should be remembered that, as much as their doctrines were regarded by critics as ἀνατρεπτικά πόλεως (Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 3.7.20), Epicureans did not view *voluptas* and *dignitas* as incompatible in all circumstances. They appear to have conceded that the ambitious man was better advised to enter politics than to frustrate a natural inclination. And in an emergency one would succour the state, without which there could be little peace and quiet for philosophy; the closing years of the Roman Republic offered notable examples.³⁶ For his part Tacitus probably relished the paradox of a consular Epicurean, which was all the more striking in a Stoic age: he took satisfaction in discovering competence or magnanimity where it was least expected, just as he did in exposing failure.³⁷ His standards were high: not even martyrdom ensured approval (*Agr.* 42.4). But he did not stint admiration for a man who could keep his head in the midst of troubles, bore the palm in tragedy, and, though devoted to the ἀπράγμων βίος, was a match for affairs when called upon.³⁸

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN