

How has the word epicurean come to mean excess?

Post by “Don” of May 19, 2023 at 3:46 PM

[Quote from ThinkingCat](#)

Also didn't Epicurus only eat water and bread and sometimes a little cheese?

That's a common misconception. Here's my commentary on that in my letter to Menoikeus translation:

Quote

These are two important words: μᾶζα, ὕδωρ. A number of commentators point to these two words to insist that Epicurus and all those who lived or studied in the Garden ate only “bread and water.” I have always been curious about which kind of bread was being referred to. It turns out its μᾶζα (maza) which was an ancient Greek barley-cake or a thick barley porridge as opposed to ἄρτος (artos), a cake or loaf of wheat bread. Maza could be a quick, hearty, simple meal all by itself. Pass the Flamingo (a website on ancient recipes and food) has an interesting article on it which includes a recipe.

It's important to point back to verse 126c at this point. The idea of eating “only” bread and water seems Spartan (pun intended) and ascetic to us, but bread and water (or, probably more commonly, wine) *was* a meal in ancient Greece. A simple meal of maza with a cup of water, without all the extra dishes that made up ὄψον, would not have been an uncommon meal. Epicurus isn't advocating an ascetic lifestyle here. He's pointing to the simple, everyday meals that many Athenians took for granted. You don't need an extravagant, ten-course feast to experience pleasure. Slow down, appreciate what's in front of you, take delight in the everyday pleasures - like that meal you don't give a second thought to. But Epicurus will have more to say about this soon.