

During the time of Epicurus, who could read well enough to study philosophy?

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 9, 2026 at 1:29 PM

Google query: If Epicurus wrote 300 books, then was he wealthy since the cost of papyrus was a significant expense?

Yes, **Epicurus was relatively wealthy** by the standards of ancient Athens, allowing him to afford the vast amounts of papyrus required to author his roughly 300 works. While his philosophy advocated simplicity, his personal financial status was comfortable enough to support his prolific writing career and distinct lifestyle. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

His wealth and writing productivity were tied to several factors:

1. Inherited Affluence and Property Ownership

Epicurus was born to Athenian parents on the island of Samos. His family possessed enough capital to secure him a top-tier education and allow him to travel widely. When he settled in Athens around 306 BC, he had the financial means to **purchase a large house with a walled garden** just outside the city walls. Known simply as "The Garden," this property served as both his home and his philosophical school. Buying real estate in ancient Athens required significant wealth. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

2. A Supported Community Network

Epicurus did not live or finance his work in isolation. The Garden operated as a communal living experiment funded by a network of **wealthy patrons, devoted students, and co-founders** who pooled their resources. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

- These followers regularly donated money and supplies to sustain the community.
- This consistent financial support allowed Epicurus to dedicate his life entirely to philosophy and writing without needing to work a traditional job for income. [[1](#), [2](#)]

3. The Definition of an Ancient "Book"

When ancient biographers like Diogenes Laërtius noted that Epicurus wrote 300 "books," it is important to understand the terminology. [[1](#), [2](#)]

- An ancient "book" (*biblion*) referred to a **single papyrus roll**, not a massive modern hardcover.
- A single roll typically held the equivalent of just one long chapter or a short modern essay (roughly 10,000 to 20,000 words max).

- His masterwork, *On Nature*, spanned 37 of these rolls. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

While purchasing 300 rolls of papyrus was a steep expense that an ordinary Athenian laborer could never afford, it was a perfectly manageable investment for an independently wealthy property owner supported by a community of dedicated disciples.