

Epicurus' Birthday Calculations

Post by "Cassius" of November 1, 2019 at 2:05 PM

Can Someone Who Is Familiar With The Ancient Greek Calendar Help Us Translate Epicurus' Birthday Into the Correct Day To Observe in 2020? Here is the information from Gassendi's Life of Epicurus - Chap 2. The Time of His Birth:

Epicurus was born (as Laertius relates out of the Chronology of Apollodorus) in the 3rd year of the 109th Olympiad, the 7th day of the month Gamelion; at whose birth, [30] Pliny saith, the Moon was twenty daies old. Hecatombeon (the first month) this year falling in the Summer of the year 4372. of the Julian Period, (now used by Chronologers) it is manifest, that Gamelion the same year, being the 7th month from Hecatombeon, fell upon the beginning of the year 4373, which was before the ordinary computation from Christ 341 compleat years. Now forasmuch as in January, in which month the beginning of Gamelion is observ'd to have fallen, there happened a new Moon in the Attick Horizon, by the Tables of Celestiall Motions, the fourth day, in the morning, (or the third day, according to the Athenians, who as [31]Censorinus saith, reckon their day from Sun-set to Sun-set) and therefore the twentieth day of the Moon is coincident with the three and twentieth of January; it will follow, that Epicurus was born on the 23rd of January, if we suppose the same form of the year extended from the time of Cefar, upwards. And this in the old style, according to which the cycle of the Sun, or of the Dominical letters for that year, (it being Biffextile) was BA, whence the 23rd day of January must have been Sunday. But if we suit it with the Gregorian account, which is ten daies earlier, (now in use with us we shall find, that Epicurus was born on the 2nd of February, which was Sunday, (for the Dominicall Letters must have been ED.) in the year before Christ, or the Christian computation, 341. and consequently in the 1974th year, compleat, before the beginning of February this year, which is from Christ 1634. Some things here must not be passed by.

First, that [32] Laertius observes Sosigenes to have been Archon the same year, wherein Epicurs was born, and that it was the 7th year from the death of Plato. Moreover, it was the 16th of Alexander, for it was, as the same [33] Laertius affirms, the year immediately following that, in which Aristotle was sent for to come to him, then 15 years old.

Secondly, that [34] Eusebius can hardly be excused from a mistake, making Epicurus to flourish in the 112th Olympiad; for at that time, Epicurus scarce had pass'd his childhood, and Aristotle began but to flourish in the Lyceum, being returned the foregoing Olympiad out of Macedonia, as appears from [35] Laertius.

Thirdly, that the error which is crept into [36] Suidas, and hath deceived his Interpreter, is not to be allowed, who reports Epicurus born in the 79th Olympiad. I need not take notice, how much this is inconsistent, not onely with other relations, but even with that which followeth in Suidas, where he extends his life to Antigonus Gonotas: I shall onely observe, that, for the number of Olympiads, Suidas having doubtlesse set down $\zeta\theta$, which denote the 109th Olympiad, the end of the ζ was easily defaced in the Manuscript, so as there remained onely θ , by which means of θ , was made the 79th Olympiad.

Fourthly, that it matters not that the Chronicon Alexandrinum, Georgius Sincellus, and others, speak too largely of the time wherein Epicurus flourished, and that we heed not the errors of some person, otherwise very learned, who make Aristippus later then Epicurus, and something of the like kind. Let us onely observe what [37] St. Hierom cites out of Cicero pro Gallio; a Poet is there mentioned, making Epicurus and Socrates discoursing together, Whose times, saith Cicero, we know were disjoyned, not by years, but ages.

Fifthly, that the birth-day of Epicurus, taken from Laertius and Pliny, seems to argue, that amongst the Athenians of old, the Civill months and the Lunary had different beginnings. This indeed will seem strange, unlesse we should imagine it may be collected, that the month Gamelion began onely from the full Moon that went before it; for, if we account the 14th day of the Moon to be the first of the month, the first of the Moon will fall upon the 7th of the month. Not to mention, that Epicurus seems in his Will to appoint his birth to be celebrated on the first Decad of the dayes of the month Gamelion, because he was born in one of them; and then ordaineth something more particular concerning the 20th of the Moon, for that it was his birth-day, as we shall relate hereafter. Unlesse you think it fit to follow the [38] anonymous Writer, who affirms, Epicurus was born on the 20th day of Gamelion; but I know not whether his authority should out-weigh Laertius. Certainly, many errors, and those very great, have been observed in him, particularly by Meurfius. I shall not take notice, that the XXXX of Gamelion might perhaps be understood of the 20th of the Moon, happening within the month Gamelion, from Cicero, whose words we shall cite hereafter. But this by the way.

Takis Panagiotopoulos:

2020-01-02/03

You can see next years here <http://www.numachi.com/~ccount/hmepa/numachi.com>

The day of moon calendar begins from the afternoon so 7th gamelion is from 2 until 3 January on this year. For 2021 the 7th gamelion is from afternoon of 20 January until next afternoon 21 January.

Elli Pensa:

Γάμηλιών • (Gamēlión) (genitive Γάμηλιώνος)

The seventh month of the Attic calendar, corresponding to the lunar term around January and February during which many weddings were customary, because it was the anniversary of Zeus and Hera's weddings but also because wars usually stopped when the winter began. Thus, the couple were enjoying themselves as newly married but also seeking to acquire children - also this period had several celebrations and there were not many agricultural works.

Cassius:

Thank you Takis and Elli! I am going to go ahead and mark our calendars for January 2, 2020, and January 20, 2021! Thank you!

Post by “Don” of March 1, 2020 at 6:21 PM

There is a [nifty calendar convertor online for the ancient Attic Calendar](#) .

It appears to line up with the lunar cycles etc. and I've used it to put Epicurus birthday on my calendar the last couple years, e.g., Feb. 3, 2020, for his 2,361st birthday.

Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2020 at 6:52 PM

Wow that's great. Eugenios did you arrive at the same result as the info in the first post for this year?

Post by “Don” of March 1, 2020 at 7:44 PM

Oops, I misspoke on my previous post!

According to that calendar convertor, the 7th of Gamelion falls on:

Jan. 31, 2020

Jan. 2, 2021

Jan. 9, 2022

Jan. 28, 2023

Jan. 17, 2024

Jan. 5, 2025

Technically, we should probably be celebrating the 20th on the 20th of each ancient Attic month 🤔 but THAT is WAY more work than anyone wants to do!! 😊 Celebrating on the 20th of each of the months of the modern calendar is a way to keep Epicurus' memory immediate and alive.

What I like about that website is that you can see the full calendar with all the festivals, months, Olympiads, etc.

Plus, as a bit of trivia, you can put in your birth year and find your own birthday in ancient Greece. Mine happens to be the 1st of Boedromion. 😊

It would be mind-numbingly difficult to exactly convert ancient dates to modern dates, but this one is the best and fullest option I've personally come across in English.

Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2020 at 7:57 PM

So this calendar calculated the 7th of Gamelion in 2020 as being on January 31 while Takis / Elli calculated January 2nd and 3rd?

Sounds like someone has a problem..... 😊

I agree that the 20th of each month in our modern calendar makes the most sense today.

Post by “Don” of March 1, 2020 at 9:05 PM

You are correct! Someone got some calculation wrong!

I just stumbled across [another calendar online](#) for an Hellenic pagan church. That one too gives 7 Gamelion as 3 Jan 2020! But it does also look like it uses the [Numachi site that Takis used](#). Oh, this is wonderful! Takis' previous link gave me an error so that's why I chimed in, but this is great! Disregard all my previous sites now.

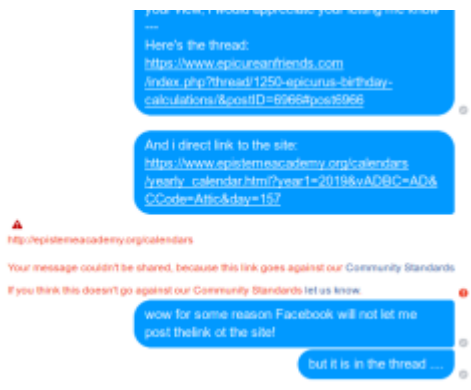
I noticed that the 1st year of the 700th Olympiad begins 7/10-11/2021. Round numbers often tend to suggest big commemorations. Epicurus birthday (according to THIS resource) in the 1st year of the 700th Olympiad will be Jan. 9-10, 2022. Do we need to plan something big? 😊

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2020 at 6:26 AM

I will email Takis and ask him about this.

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2020 at 6:31 AM

Bizarre! Facebook will not let me message a link to that calendar site!



Post by “Eikadistes” of May 16, 2021 at 5:01 PM

In *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, DeWitt proposes a date of **February 7th**:

Quote

"The relevant dates are known with a precision that is uncommon in the lives of great men of ancient times. He was born of Athenian parents on the island of Samos in **early February** of the year 341 B.C." (36)

Quote

"At any rate [...] the date was fixed, not for **the anniversary day of his birth, which fell on the seventh**, but at the twentieth, the day that marked the final initiations at Eleusis. The twentieth was also sacred to Apollo, which gave it an additional sanctity. Such notoriety eventually attached itself to these monthly memorial gatherings that Epicureans were dubbed 'Twentyers' by way of derision" (51-52)

Post by "Don" of May 16, 2021 at 6:47 PM

First, I'd suggest this one for current calculations:

<http://www.numachi.com/~ccount/hmepa/>

For the date in 341 BCE, I'd be skeptical of any exact date. Trying to align the Olympiads and the lunar cycles of any Ancient calendar is fraught with complications. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attic_calendar?wprov= Gamelion, the month of his birth according to Laertius, falls in January to February:

"And he was born as we are told by Apollodorus, in his Chronicles, in the third year of the hundred and ninth Olympiad, in the archonship of Sosigenes [342/1 B.C.], on the seventh day of the month Gamelion [January/February], seven years after the death of Plato.

Post by "Cassius" of May 16, 2021 at 6:59 PM

Sounds like perhaps for practical purposes the 20th of January each year might serve as a reasonable approximation, if someone were looking for a stable date.

Post by “Don” of May 16, 2021 at 7:16 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Sounds like perhaps for practical purposes the 20th of January each year might serve as a reasonable approximation, if someone were looking for a stable date.

That's not a bad compromise. One could use the new calculations on the calendar link I sent, but that date is going to move around depending on the lunar cycles.

Post by “Don” of May 16, 2021 at 8:39 PM

Wikipedia has a nice list of Athenian archons: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eponymous_archon?wprov=sfla1 and Sosigenes is right in there where he should be.