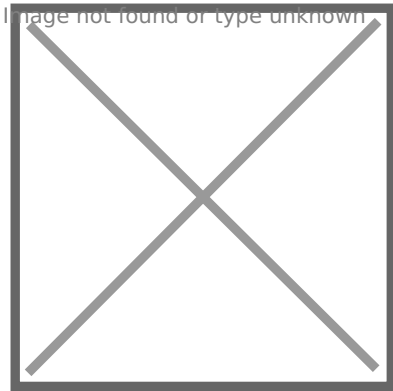


Caesar The Epicurean? A Matter of Life and Death - Volk 2022

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2025 at 9:36 AM

Here is another article discussing Julius Caesar as potentially Epicurean. I don't yet have a fix on how to compare it to the 1977 article by Frank Bourne, but we have links to both in our "Julius Caesar" subsection of the forum.



[Caesar the Epicurean? A Matter of Life and Death](#)

In *Epicurus in Rome: Philosophical Perspectives in the Ciceronian Age*, ed. by S. Yona and G. Davis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 72-86.
www.academia.edu

Couple of sections that catch my attention:

Quote

That Caesar was informed about Epicureanism is without doubt. Even if he had undergone no specifically philosophical training himself, a basic knowledge concerning the major philosophical schools was, by the first century BC, part and parcel of the Roman aristocracy's cultural competence, and Caesar can hardly have failed to pick up the principles of Rome's most fashionable philosophical creed. Furthermore, as has often been pointed out, many of Caesar's friends and followers were Epicureans. These include not only his father-in-law Piso, but also his trusted lieutenant C. Vibius Pansa Caetronianus and the jurist C. Trebatius Testa. In the case of such other Caesarians as L. Cornelius Balbus, A. Hirtius and C. Matius, we cannot be sure about their philosophical allegiance, but Epicurean leanings have often been suggested. While older views that Epicureanism provided a political ideology for the Caesarian party

have long been debunked, and it is well established that Epicureans stood on both sides of the Civil War, the concentration of putative Epicureans in Caesar's circle is still worth noting.

What is especially interesting is the evidence for Epicurean activity in the Caesarian camp during the campaigns in Gaul, Germany and Britain. Trebatius, who had joined Caesar's staff on the recommendation of Cicero, converted to Epicureanism in 53 BC, apparently under the influence of Pansa. His mentor back in Rome reacted in mock horror: "My friend Pansa tells me you have become an Epicurean. That's a great camp you got there!" (indicavit mihi Pansa meus Epicureum te esse factum. o castra praeclara!, Fam. 1.11.1). Just a year earlier, the leisure hours of the campaigning Caesarian officers may have been taken up with studying Lucretius' brand-new poem. As Christopher Krebs has shown, following F. R. Dale, Caesar himself must have read *On the Nature of Things* in 54, to judge from striking verbal echoes in Books 5, 6, and 7 of his Gallic War. It is possible that Caesar, and perhaps other philosophically interested members of his staff, were introduced to Lucretius by Quintus Cicero, who knew the poem by February 54 (Cic. QFr. 1.11.1) and joined Caesar's campaign shortly thereafter. Dale (1994, 111) fondly imagines that Caesar "read Lucretius with Quintus in Britain, on a summer evening in his tent."

Would be particularly interesting to follow up on the reference to verbal parallels between Lucretius and Caesar's "Gallic War"!

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2025 at 9:46 AM

I see Trebatius Testa, apparently a well-known figure, is listed in Wikipedia, but Epicurean leanings are not mentioned --

[Trebatius Testa - Wikipedia](#)

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2025 at 9:54 AM

Also:

Quote

Caesar also offers a striking argument against the death penalty itself (Sall. BC 51.20):

de poena possum equidem dicere, id quod res habet, in luctu atque miseriis mortem aerumnarum requiem, non cruciatum esse; eam cuncta mortalium mala dissolvere; ultra neque curae neque gaudio locum esse.

About the punishment I can speak according to the facts: in sorrow and misery death is a relief from grief, not a torture. It dissolves all human ills, and beyond it, there is place for neither care nor joy.

While Sallust is not quoting Caesar verbatim, he presumably availed himself of the senatorial archives in reconstructing the speeches, and the historicity of the remarks on death is confirmed not only by the fact that Sallust's Cato, in responding to Caesar, refers back to them, but crucially also by Cicero's own summary of the discussion in the fourth speech Against Catiline.

As for Cato, he begins his attack on Caesar's proposal as follows (Sall. BC 52.13):

bene et conposite C. Caesar paulo ante in hoc ordine de vita et morte disseruit, credo falsa existumans ea quae de inferis memorantur, divorso itinere malos a bonis loca taetra, inculta, foeda atque formidulosa habere.

C. Caesar a little while ago gave this order a well-phrased and well-structured lecture on life and death, apparently deeming false what is said about the underworld, namely, that divorced from the good, the wicked inhabit horrid, desolate, foul and fearful places.

Display More