

What was the geographical reach of Ancient Epicurean thought?

Post by “Matt” of February 9, 2019 at 5:30 PM

I think I posed this question before in my Facebook days, but I was wondering what evidence (if any) is there of Epicurean philosophy being practiced in large areas during the Roman Period (outside of the greater Greco-Roman area?)

I know in the Confessions of St. Augustine, he speaks of having acquaintances that were Epicurean. In fact I believe he said that if it were not for his belief in the survival of the soul, he would've become one. But I believe this discourse was in Milan, not in his native North Africa.

Any known Roman era North African Epicureans or Epicurean communities in North Africa, Iberia, Gaul or Britain?

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2019 at 5:46 PM

Excellent question. I haven't read anything on this, but I would have to expect that some Epicureans were in Britain.

Post by “Matt” of February 9, 2019 at 5:58 PM

I've been revisiting a time in history that I find interesting, the relationship and conflicts between North Africa and Rome, specifically Carthage.

I wonder how much influence Greek philosophy had on the rather religiously pious Carthaginians and Berber tribes? It's clear that the Punics borrowed some military tactics from the Greeks, but maintained their Phoenician identity, religion and customs.

The only native philosopher I can come up with was Apuleius, from Berber Numidia. He was a Platonist. I was just wondering if there were any known Epicureans hailing from those areas.

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2019 at 6:45 PM

Yes the Carthage - Phoenician connection is fascinating - I wish I knew more about the whole issue of who the Carthaginians were, relationship to Egypt, etc.

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2019 at 6:47 PM

Exploring this would probably also touch on the background of Philodemus of Gadara

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Gadara>

Post by “Matt” of February 10, 2019 at 11:57 AM

From what I understand the Punics (Carthaginians) were directly descended from the Phoenicians. Carthage was a colony of Tyre in Phoenicia. The culture and language was a sister to the Hebrew culture as both cultures grew out of Canaan.

(We have them to thank for the Latin and Greek alphabet.)

The Phoenicians were maritime merchants that created an empire of trading ports all through the mediterranean . As time passed, Carthage became more separated from Tyre, and the culture evolved it's own distinct aspects. Eventually coming into contact and conflict with the fledgling Roman society. Unfortunately that conflict left Carthage entirely destroyed by Rome.

Post by “Cassius” of February 10, 2019 at 12:07 PM

I am not sure whether I immediately can say that it was "unfortunate" other than out of an extremely general preference to let people live as they like. To me this ambiguity is very much like the Roman civil war - it looks like we can make some general observations about the issues motivating both sides, but I have a very strong impression that our information is so incomplete that our description might be totally different from what people at the time thought was going on. Lots of people take Caesar's side today, but at the time very many (including Cassius and

Brutus, who I gather were very honorable people too) were on the side of the Senate. I'm no longer confident which side I would argue to be "right" or even which side I would most identify myself.

Post by "Matt" of February 10, 2019 at 12:15 PM

I only say unfortunate because the Romans were fairly rigorous in their destruction of the city. There's very little left in archeological terms. I liken it to the destruction of any ancient thing that leaves almost no trace behind, like the Library of Alexandria for example.

