

Apollonius of Tyana

Itinerant first-century preacher and healer reputed to have performed miracles and supernatural feats.

Life and Career

It is not known exactly when Apollonius of Tyana was born and died. The only complete source about his life is an eight-book biography written by [Philostratus of Lemnos](#) (c 170-247 AD). This work is based on information given by Moiragenes, secretary to the emperor Maximus, and by the *Memoirs* attributed to [Damis](#), a devoted acolyte who followed Apollonius in his travels to Rome, Egypt, Ethiopia, Persia, Babylon, Ephesus, and other parts of Asia Minor and the Greco-Roman world.¹ Philostratus also quotes fragments of texts and letters supposedly authored by Apollonius himself.

According to Philostratus, Apollonius lived for a while in India, as a result of which he is sometimes characterized as a neo-Pythagorean philosopher (Pythagoras of Samos having according to certain later writers having himself spent time in Egypt and India.)² Many people took Apollonius for a divine prophet, revering him for his spiritual teachings, miracle working and healing powers, for all of which he has often been compared with Jesus of Nazareth.

Paranormal Incidents

Paranormal incidents attributed to Appollonius can be characterized as either mental or physical.³

The mental class includes clairvoyance and precognition. For instance, Appollonius is said to have

- anticipated a conspiracy against Rome hatched by the governor of Cilicia and the king of Cappadocia.⁴
- remotely witnessed the assassination of Domitian in 96 AD, an event later confirmed by messengers from Rome.⁵
- predicted a plague in Ephesus.⁶
- predicted devastating earthquakes in Ionia.⁷

In Athens, having been refused initiation into the [Epidaurian Mysteries](#) by an official, he accurately named the official's successor who would accept him four years later.⁸

In Rome during the reign of Nero he interpreted thunder heard while an eclipse was taking place to mean that 'Something momentous is going to happen and not happen'. Shortly afterwards, the emperor narrowly escaped death by a lightning strike.⁹

In incidents classed as physical, Apollonius is said to have

- raised a young bride from the dead.[10](#)
- exorcized a young man possessed by a demon.[11](#)
- cured a rabid dog and its victim.[12](#)
- teleported himself from Smyrna to Ephesus, and again from Smyrna to Rome.[13](#)

From earliest times to the present day, the supernatural nature of Apollonius's alleged activities has led to comparisons with those of Jesus of Nazareth, with differing views as to which were the most reliable and spectacular. In ancient times this question typically arose when the Christians were under public attack, although Apollonius was controversial even among pagan apologists. The parallels between the two are so clear that they continue to be critically discussed.[14](#)

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Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Abraham (2017), 229-30; Elsner (1997), 22-23. Dzielska (1986), 186.
- [2.](#) Dzielska (1986), 94-95.
- [3.](#) Thalbourne, (1995).
- [4.](#) Philostratus (1969), I,12.
- [5.](#) Philostratus (1969), VIII, 26-27). For a discussion of parapsychological issues, see Thalbourne (1995), 244. Sceptical objections are made by Dodds (1973), 171-72.
- [6.](#) Philostratus (1969), IV, 4.
- [7.](#) Philostratus (1969), IV, 6.
- [8.](#) Philostratus (1969), IV,18.
- [9.](#) Philostratus (1969), IV, 43.
- [10.](#) Philostratus (1969), IV, 45.
- [11.](#) Philostratus (1969), IV, 20.
- [12.](#) Philostratus (1969), VI, 43.
- [13.](#) Philostratus (1969), VII, 9-10.
- [14.](#) Burt (1967), 69-70; Thalbourne (1995), 241.