

The Twelve Fundamentals - Discussion on Lucretius Today Podcast

Post by "Don" of June 20, 2022 at 9:15 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Clay also has a slightly different version in Lucretius and Epicurus, but I do not have access to it. They are essentially the same, but Clay never presents the same list in the same order twice

That's the primary problem with trying to reconstruct a lost text with NO surviving fragments. My understanding is that the ONLY reference to the "Twelve Fundamentals" is the one in Diogenes Laertius: *colour varies with the arrangement of the atoms he states in his "Twelve Rudiments". Δώδεκα στοιχειώσεσί ; further, that they are not of any and every size ; at any rate no atom has ever been seen by our sense.*

Epicurus uses στοιχεῖα in the letter to Menoikeus (123) to refer to the elements of the noble/good life: στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, στοιχεί-ωσις](#)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, στοιχεῖον](#)

Without at least some fragments, there's no way to know what the Δώδεκα στοιχειώσεσί discussed. Who knows? Epicurus could have been talking about something else and brought in the color and size of atoms to make a point about our senses. Maybe the Δώδεκα στοιχειώσεσί were about those who say we can't trust our senses and Epicurus was laying out why we could. There's no way to know again without at least some fragments of papyrus or other references.

PS. The only reference to a "twelve" of anything in the surviving fragments of Diogenes' wall inscription is: *For if the pain takes a turn for] the worse, it no longer continues severely, but the crisis comes and passes away in the shortest time; while if it is relieved, it ushers the creature to health. What then, in the name of the twelve gods, is terrible about that? Or how can we justly bring a complaint against nature, if someone who has lived for so many years and so many months and so many days [comes to his last day?]*

PPS: If I'm missing a key reference or textual fragment of the Δώδεκα στοιχειώσεσί, please don't hesitate to point me towards it! If love to be wrong about the one reference in Laertius.