

# Epicurean nautical references, allusions, and metaphors in the texts

Post by "Don" of August 25, 2022 at 5:43 PM

I first came to be curious about allusions to nautical topics within the Epicurean texts - from Epicurus himself onward - when I saw commentary on the fact that ataraxia (and ataraktos) not only semantically means "calmness" and "tranquility" but also had the connotation (or could be applied to) the calmness of the sea, still water with no waves and no trouble for the mariners.

It makes perfect sense. The ancient Greeks were a sea-faring, island-dwelling culture. No polis was that far from a shoreline. Athens itself was connected to its port "suburb" Pireaus by the Long Walls.

However, what I like the most, is that it gives a concreteness, a solidity, to the philosophy. As some have said, ataraxia is a hard term to understand if you don't know Greek. But tell someone to imagine a sea with the water still, no choppy waves, reflecting the sunshine and clouds, and maybe it gets easier to understand what ataraxia means.

Consider this a start only, a working draft if you will. If anyone has any favorites or any questions on whether a particular word or phrase falls into this category, consider this an open thread for everyone.

Fragment 163

παιδείαν δὲ πᾶσαν, μακάριε, φεῦγε τὰκάτιον ἀράμενος.

\* Flee from all indoctrination, O blessed one, and hoist the sail of your own little boat. (personal translation)

1. τὰκάτιον = (to) akation "light boat, small sail" < ἄκατος "light vessel, boat, ship", in Modern Greek "dinghy, small skiff"

-ιον = noun-forming diminutive suffix

2. ἀράμενος < ἀείρω = "get ships under sail"

Note the ambiguity of ἀκάτιον meaning both a small (diminutive) boat and small sail being used synonymously.

Metaphor: self-reliance, setting sail free of indoctrination or acculturation

Vatican Saying 17

οὐ νέος μακαριστὸς ἀλλὰ γέρων βεβιωκῶς καλῶς· ὁ γὰρ νέος ἀκμῇ πολὺς ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἑτεροφρονῶν πλάζεται· ὁ δὲ γέρων καθάπερ ἐν λιμένι τῷ γήρα καθώρμικεν, τὰ πρότερον δυσελπιστούμενα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀσφαλεῖ κατακλείσας χάριτι.

\* It is not the young man who is most happy, but the old man who has lived beautifully; for despite being at his very peak the young man stumbles around as if he were of many minds, whereas the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, secure in his gratitude for the good things he was once unsure of.

1. ἐν λιμένι < λιμήν "harbor; haven, retreat, refuge"

2. καθώρμικεν < καθορμίζω "bring a ship into harbor, bring to anchor"

Note: κατακλείσας < κατακλείω (not nautical, but interesting: literally means to be "shut in, confined; enclosed, e.g., a mummy in its case; close a speech, conclude" This is the word evidently translated as "secure". χάριτι = dative "by/through/for gratitude."

Metaphor: An elder is "secure" in their gratitude for the pleasures they've experienced, those memories are safely docked in a harbor.

Variations on γᾶλήνη "stillness of the sea, calm; calmness, serenity"

Aeschylus: metaph., φρόνημα νηνέμου γαλάνας "spirit of serenest calm"

Metaphor: The calm sea without turbulence or waves is comparable to the calmness and serenity of the mind.

Letter to Herodotus, 37

Ὅθεν δὴ πᾶσι χρησίμης οὔσης τοῖς ὠκειωμένοις φυσιολογία τῆς τοιαύτης ὁδοῦ, παρεγγυῶν τὸ συνεχὲς ἐνέργημα ἐν φυσιολογία καὶ τοιούτῳ μάλιστα ἐγγαληνίζων τῷ βίῳ ἐποίησά σοι καὶ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἐπιτομὴν καὶ στοιχείωσιν τῶν ὄλων δοξῶν.

\* Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up natural science, I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the calm enjoyment of a life like this, have prepared for you just such an epitome and manual of the doctrines as a whole.

1. ἐγγαληνίζων τῷ βίῳ "spend life calmly, serenely"

Letter to Herodotus, 83

Τοιαῦτα γὰρ ἐστίν, ὥστε καὶ τοὺς κατὰ μέρος ἤδη ἐξακριβοῦντας ἱκανῶς ἢ καὶ τελείως, εἰς τὰς τοιαύτας ἀναλύνοντας ἐπιβολάς, τὰς πλείστας τῶν περιοδειῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως ποιεῖσθαι: ὅσοι δὲ μὴ παντελῶς τῶν ἀποτελουμένων εἰσίν, ἐκ τούτων καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἄνευ φθόγγων τρόπον τὴν ἅμα νοήματι περίοδον τῶν κυριωτάτων πρὸς γαληνισμόν ποιοῦνται.

\* It is of such a sort that those who are already tolerably, or even perfectly, well acquainted with the details can, by analysis of what they know into such elementary perceptions as these,

best prosecute their researches in physical science as a whole ; while those, on the other hand, who are not altogether entitled to rank as mature students can in silent fashion and as quick as thought run over the doctrines most important for their peace of mind.

1. γαληνισμόν "calming" as used here by Epicurus; also used by Aristotle to mean "calming of the conscience" (Arist. Ep.5): πρὸς γαληνισμόν ποιοῦνται can be paraphrased as "productive for the calming (of their minds) like a waveless sea"

Lucretius, On the Nature of Things (Perseus search)

[Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, BOOK I, line 1](#)

"ship"

book 2, card 522: ... joining into one. But, just as, after mighty ship-wrecks piled, The mighty main is wont to

book 4, card 379: ... Nor lightly think our senses everywhere Are tottering. The ship in which we sail Is borne along, although it seems to stand; The ship that bides in roadstead is supposed There to ... Seem fleeing fast astern, past which we urge The ship and fly under the bellying sails. The stars

book 4, card 877: ... these twain factors, severally, Body is borne like ship with oars and wind. Nor yet in these... subtle body, Yet pushes, driving on the mighty ship Of mighty bulk; one hand directs the same

book 5, card 988: ... Out to disaster: for the science bold Of ship-sailing lay dark in those far times. Again

book 6, card 1002: ... thereof, Shoves it and pushes, as wind the ship and sails. The same doth happen in all

"sea" - 50 results

book 1, card 1: ... Immortal charm. Lull to a timely rest O'er sea and land the savage works of war, For

book 1, card 146: ... thing, No fixed seed required. Men from the sea Might rise, and from the land the scaly

book 1, card 205: ... each? Whence may the water-springs, beneath the sea, Or inland rivers, far and wide away,

book 1, card 238: ... 'Tis clear, are sightless bodies sweeping through The sea, the lands, the clouds along the sky, Vexing

book 1, card 763: ... ; for these Same germs do put together sky, sea, lands, Rivers, and sun, grains, trees, and breathing

book 1, card 1002: ... And mountain walls hedge air; land ends the sea, And sea in turn all lands; but for the All ... single nature, ne'ertheless Immeasurably forth.... Nor sea, nor earth, nor shining vaults of sky, Nor

book 1, card 1083: ... those Of earth and water (liquid of the sea, And the big billows from the mountain slopes

book 2, card 1: ... beholdest forth Thy fleets to swarm, deploying down the sea: For then, by such bright circumstance abashed,

book 2, card 333: ... With shells and conchs, where, with soft waves, the sea Beats on the thirsty sands of curving shores.

book 2, card 660: ... sprouting from man's trunk, Limbs of a sea-beast to a land-beast knit, And nature

book 2, card 1048: ... commencements fit Of mighty things- the earth, the sea, the sky, And race of living creatures. Thus

book 2, card 1105: ... world, ere since The risen first-born day of sea, earth, sun, Have many germs been added from... them on, Brought hither, that from them the sea and lands Could grow more big, and that

book 2, card 1144: ... The mortal generations to the fields; Nor sea, nor breakers pounding on the rocks Created them;

book 3, card 487: ... if to vomit soul, As on the salt sea boil the billows round Under the master might

book 3, card 830: ... to which the empery should fall By land and sea, thus when we are no more, When comes... then- No, not if earth confounded were with sea, And sea with heaven. But if indeed do feel The

book 3, card 1024: ... , he- Who whilom paved a highway down the sea, And gave his legionaries thoroughfare Along the

book 4, card 199: ... one instant of the day, and fly O'er sea and lands and flood the heaven, what then

book 4, card 217: ... The wet of a salt taste, when by the sea We roam about; and so, whene'er we

book 4, card 414: ... the sky. Again, to gazers ignorant of the sea, Vessels in port seem, as with broken poops

book 4, card 777: ... Directly we desire- if heart prefer The sea, the land, or after all the sky? Assemblies

book 4, card 1121: ... green light are set in gold; And rich sea-purple dress by constant wear  
Grows shabby and

book 4, card 1233: ... her bosom Now yielding like the billows of the sea- Aye, from the  
ploughshare's even course and

book 5, card 1: ... us Along the Atlantic shore and wastes of sea?- Where neither one of us  
approacheth nigh

book 5, card 110: ... bridled by religion, thou suppose Lands, sun, and sky, sea, constellations,  
moon, Must dure forever, as of frame... exist a tree, Nor clouds in the salt sea, nor in the fields  
Can fishes live, nor

book 5, card 195: ... ; And cliffs, and desert fens, and wastes of sea (Which sunder afar the  
beaches of the lands... why Doth nature feed and foster on land and sea The dreadful breed of  
savage beasts, the foes

book 5, card 261: And for the rest, that sea, and streams, and springs Forever with new waters

book 5, card 351: ... the sky, against the sun and earth And deep-sea waters, but wide open  
stands And gloats upon

book 5, card 380: ... inundations vast From forth the unplumbed chasms of the sea. But vain-  
since winds (that over-sweep

book 5, card 416: ... oft the commencements fit Of mighty things- earth, sea, and sky, and race  
Of living creatures.

book 5, card 432: ... The lofty heavens from the lands, and cause The sea to spread with waters  
separate, And fires of

book 5, card 449: ... their mass those particles Which were to form the sea, the stars, the sun,  
And moon, and ramparts

book 5, card 495: ... one unaltered urge, the Pontus proves- That sea which floweth forth with  
fixed tides, Keeping one

book 5, card 772: ... the land-dwellers ever have come up Out of sea-pools of salt. How true  
remains, How merited

book 5, card 988: ... lightly too; Nor soft seductions of a serene sea Could lure by laughing  
billows any man

book 5, card 1028: ... , the flying race, the dappled birds, Hawks, ospreys, sea-gulls, searching  
food and life Amid the ocean

book 5, card 1194: ... ? When, too, fierce force of fury-winds at sea Sweepeth a navy's admiral  
down the main

book 5, card 1436: ... All portioned out and boundaried; already Would the sea flower and sail-winged ships; Already men had

book 6, card 121: ... ; As when along deep streams or the great sea Breaks the loud surf. It happens, too, whenever

book 6, card 246: ... to forge. Besides, full often also out at sea A blackest thunderhead, like cataract Of pitch

book 6, card 379: ... ? Then for what reason shoots he at the sea?- What sacrilege have waves and bulk of brine

book 6, card 423: ... self into the waters there And rouses all the sea with monstrous roar, Constraining it to seethe. It

book 6, card 470: ... moisture, prove That nature lifts from over all the sea Unnumbered particles. Whereby the more 'Tis manifest

book 6, card 495: ... Whilst the winds bear them o'er the mighty sea, Like hanging fleeces of white wool. Thuswise,

book 6, card 577: ... such omnipotent Convulsions on the land, and in the sea Engulfed hath sunken many a city down

book 6, card 608: ... the random rains And flying tempests, which spatter every sea And every land bedew; add their own springs... drop. Wherefore 'tis less a marvel that the sea, The mighty ocean, increaseth not. Besides, ... garments dripping all with wet; And many a sea, and far out-spread beneath, Do we behold

book 6, card 639: ... a sudden move, And fierce typhoons can over sea and lands Go tearing on, and Aetna's ... though yet All these, with sky and land and sea to boot, Are all as nothing to the

book 6, card 680: ... Tumultuous power. Besides, in mighty part, The sea there at the roots of that same mount ... sucks back its surf. And grottos from the sea pass in below Even to the bottom of ... water and air] Deeply to penetrate from the open sea, And to out-blow abroad, and to up

book 6, card 703: ... may bar His mouths against his onward waves, when sea, Wild in the winds, tumbles the sand to

book 6, card 879: ... fountain far There is at Aradus amid the sea, Which bubbles out sweet water and disparts

book 6, card 906: ... The wet of a salt taste, when by the sea We roam about; and so, whene'er we