

# 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 τᾰκάτιον ἀράμενος.

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

1. τᾰκάτιον = (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 γαλήνη "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 ὑκλειωμένοις 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 ὅλων 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 ποιῆσθαι: 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. γαληνισμὸν "calming" as used here by Epicurus; also used by Aristotle to mean "calming of the conscience" (Arist. Ep.5): πρὸς γαληνισμὸν 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

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2022 at 7:46 PM**

Great! Would the "shores of light" references in Lucretius fit in this picture?

Humphries Book One:

But now, since all created things have come

From their own definite kinds of seed, they move

From their beginnings toward the shores of light

Out of their primal notes.

...

There must be

A proper meeting of their seeds in time

For us to see them at maturity

Grown by their season's favor, living earth

Bringing them safely to the shores of light.

Humphries Book Two:

They give her eunuch priests

To demonstrate that men are sometimes found

Unworthy of their fathers, ravishers  
Of the maternal godhead, and such men  
Must not send offspring to the shores of light.

Humphries Book Five:

And why

Must every season bring disease? And why

Is early death so free to walk the world?

When nature, after struggle, tears the child

Out of its mother's womb to the shores of light,

He lies there naked, lacking everything,

Like a sailor driven wave-battered to some coast,

And the poor little thing fills all the air

With lamentation - but that's only right

In view of all the griefs that lie ahead

Along his way through life.

Now I turn

To our own earth's beginnings, to how the fields

All gently made decision what new birth

To send to the shores of light, or to commit

To the whims of the wind.

....

Time brings everything

Little by little to the shores of light

By grace of art and reason, till we see

All things illuminate each other's rise

Up to the pinnacles of loftiness.

MFSMITH -- Book One:

Since you and you alone stand at the helm of nature's ship, and since without your sanction nothing springs up into the shining shores of light, nothing blossoms into mature loveliness, it is you whom I desire to be my associate in writing this poem \*On the Nature of Things,\* which I am attempting to compose for my friend Memmius.<sup>3</sup> Through your will, goddess, he is always endowed outstandingly with all fine qualities. So with all the more justification, Venus, give my words charm that will ensure their immortality.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 25, 2022 at 8:53 PM**

\*search: shore\*

book 1, card 238: ... of touch. And raiment, hung by surf-beat shore, grows moist, The same, spread out before the

book 5, card 1: ... could he inflict on us Along the Atlantic shore and wastes of sea?- Where neither one of

book 6, card 470: ... Besides, the clothes hung-out along the shore, When in they take the clinging moisture, prove

Do you know the line number of the "shores of light"? It doesn't seem to come up as a phrase in the Leonard translation on Perseus.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2022 at 10:23 PM**

I will have to track them down over the weekend. I wonder if they are a special translation decision by Humphries

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 25, 2022 at 10:29 PM

I believe this is one, which Munro translates as borders (Book one)

159] If things came from nothing, any kind might be born of any thing, nothing would require seed. Men for instance might rise out of the sea, the scaly race out of the earth, and birds might burst out of the sky; horned and other herds, every kind of wild beasts would haunt with changing broad tilth and wilderness alike. Nor would the same fruits keep constant to trees, but would change; any tree might bear any fruit. For if there were not begetting bodies for each, how could things have a fixed unvarying mother? But in fact because things are all produced from fixed seeds, each thing is born and goes forth into the borders of light out of that in which resides its matter and first bodies; and for this reason all things cannot be gotten out of all things, because in particular things resides a distinct power

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## Post by “Don” of August 25, 2022 at 10:38 PM

Got it! Good one! Thanks!

[Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, BOOK I, line 146](#)

Again, why see we lavished o'er the lands

At spring the rose, at summer heat the corn,

The vines that mellow when the autumn lures,

If not because the fixed seeds of things

At their own season must together stream,

And new creations only be revealed

When the due times arrive and pregnant earth

Safely may give unto the shores of light

Her tender progenies? But if from naught

Were their becoming, they would spring abroad

Suddenly, unforeseen, in alien months,  
With no primordial germs, to be preserved  
From procreant unions at an adverse hour.

Looking up the Latin:

in luminis oras

"In partic., the coast, sea-coast"

[Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary, ōra](#)

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## **Post by "Don" of August 25, 2022 at 10:41 PM**

Evidently, I needed to search the plural:

**\*\*shores\*\***

book 1, card 1: ... without thee naught Is risen to reach the shining shores of light, Nor aught of joyful or of

book 1, card 146: ... are all, Each birth goes forth upon the shores of light From its own stuff, from its ... arrive and pregnant earth Safely may give unto the shores of light Her tender progenies? But if from

book 1, card 705: ... straits, Swift ocean cuts her boundaries from the shores Of the Italic mainland. Here the waste

book 2, card 333: ... the sea Beats on the thirsty sands of curving shores. Wherefore again, again, since seeds of things

book 2, card 522: ... masts and swimming oars, so that afar Along all shores of lands are seen afloat The carven fragments ... is the wildered wail Of infants coming to the shores of light: No night a day, no dawn

book 2, card 581: ... are to be adjudged Unfit to give unto the shores of light A living progeny. The Galli come:

book 2, card 991: ... in earth sinks back, and what was sent From shores of ether, that, returning home, The vaults of

book 4, card 199: ... what a point of time An image from the shores of ether falls Unto the shores of earth? Wherefore, again, And yet again, '

book 4, card 379: ... the huge plains of ocean spread beneath The vasty shores of ether, and intervene A thousand lands, possessed

book 4, card 522: ... raucous boomings, or when swans By night from icy shores of Helicon With wailing voices raise their liquid

book 5, card 195: ... when nature first Hath poured him forth upon the shores of light With birth-pangs from within the

book 5, card 449: ... settle, but too much to glide Along the upmost shores; and yet they are In such a wise

book 5, card 772: ... parturition had decreed To raise in air unto the shores of light And to entrust unto the wayward

book 5, card 1379: ... of men, And reason uplifts it to the shores of light. These tunes would soothe and glad

book 5, card 1436: ... of men, And reason uplifts it to the shores of light. For one thing after other did

book 6, card 608: ... frame, And neighbours on the seas, girdling their shores, The water's wet must seep into the

book 6, card 738: ... thence the under-gods draw down Souls to dark shores of Acheron- as stags, The

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## Post by “Don” of August 27, 2022 at 4:52 AM

\*ships\*

book 1, card 80: ... Making his child a sacrificial beast To give the ships auspicious winds for Troy: Such are the crimes

book 1, card 238: ... our face and frame, Unseen, and swamp huge ships and rend the clouds, Or, eddying wildly down

book 5, card 324: ... arts are being still Refined, still increased: now unto ships Is being added many a new device;

book 5, card 1436: ... ; already Would the sea flower and sail-winged ships; Already men had, under treaty pacts,

book 6, card 423: ... Aroused by puffing gusts; and whatso'er Of ships are caught within that tumult then Come into

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## Post by “Don” of August 27, 2022 at 7:01 AM

Yep, definitely need to search the plural AND singular forms...

\*seas\*

book 1, card 1: ... thou walkest forth to lead, And thence through seas and mountains and swift streams, Through leafy homes

book 1, card 185: ... not prepare Men of a bulk to ford the seas afoot, Or rend the mighty mountains with their

book 1, card 238: ... with eld and foul decay, Or when salt seas eat under beetling crags. Thus Nature ever by

book 1, card 705: ... and flows In mighty bend and bay the Ionic seas, Splashing the brine from off their gray-green

book 5, card 91: ... by empty promises- behold, Before all else, the seas, the lands, the sky: O Memmius, their threefold

book 5, card 261: ... with his rays dissolves) Do minish the level seas; in part because The water is diffused underground

book 5, card 380: ... with his rays dissolves) Do minish the level seas and trust their power To dry up all,

book 5, card 449: ... extend the vast Cerulean zones of all the level seas, Caved in, and down along the hollows poured

book 5, card 988: ... nor would then The ramping breakers of the main seas dash Whole argosies and crews upon the rocks.

book 5, card 1436: ... Shows us a footprint. Sailings on the seas, Tillings of fields, walls, laws, and arms, and

book 6, card 357: ... both cold and heat Are mixed in the cross-seas of the year, So that a discord rises... account these seasons of the year Are nominated "cross-seas."- And no marvel If in those times

book 6, card 423: ... come down, Discharged from on high, upon the seas. For it haps that sometimes from the sky descends Upon the seas a column, as if pushed, Round which the... until 'tis like a column from sky Upon the seas pushed downward- gradually, As if a Somewhat ... from out the cloud it rushes Down on the seas, and starts among the waves A wondrous seething,

book 6, card 608: ... porous through her frame, And neighbours on the seas, girdling their shores, The water's wet must... briny ocean, as from lands it comes Into the seas. For brine is filtered off, And then the

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## **Post by “Joshua” of August 27, 2022 at 5:11 PM**

Have you formulated any opinion as to the meaning of this?

Allow me to free-associate:

In his 31st Vatican Saying, Epicurus writes that "*it is possible to provide security against other things, but as far as death is concerned, we men all live in a city without walls.*"

This condition is not at all times apparent to all of us; so that the necessary first step in philosophical instruction is to convince the student that their's is a condition which requires philosophical intervention. But just as the physician contends not only with injuries and disease, but also with quacks and charlatans who exacerbate them, the philosopher will find that the whole of the earth has been salted against his seeds.

Does he wish to illustrate the precarious condition of his listeners? Their ears are ringing with the promises of a false security--of a life beyond the grave--of the spiritual power of the church and the temporal power of institutions. They--we--must be made to adventure on life, then, so as to remember its perils, and no one who puts forth on open water will have forgotten them.

Epicurus' invitation to the sea is then, rightly understood, an invitation to philosophy. It is an invitation to throw off false security, and in our danger find real peace in the freedom from fear.

## **Post by “Cassius” of August 27, 2022 at 6:13 PM**

Someone can also correct this poor rendering of the passage, but Joshua reminds me of the saying that the safest place for a ship is in port but that is not what ships are made for....

So the art of sailing successfully in dangerous waters is a useful analogy for a lot of things

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## **Post by “Joshua” of August 27, 2022 at 6:52 PM**

Quote

A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.

Hadn't heard that one. John Augustus Shedd.

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## **Post by “Joshua” of August 27, 2022 at 7:12 PM**

This may serve to illustrate a contrasting approach:

Quote

And he saith unto them, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Are they to count on this intercession every time they put to sea? Failing that, their woes are doubled. "Where is God in all of this?"

I heard that said by someone close to me this very week.

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## **Post by “Don” of August 27, 2022 at 8:05 PM**

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Quote

A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.

Hadn't heard that one. John Augustus Shedd.

"Set sail in your own little boat, blessed one, free from all indoctrination!"

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of August 27, 2022 at 9:30 PM**

[Quote from Joshua](#)

John Augustus Shedd.

A ship in harbor is safe,

*but that is not what ships are built for.*

Just a week or two ago I saw this in a coffeehouse and took a photo, since it captured my interest.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of August 27, 2022 at 9:58 PM**

Just pondering: How many times might Epicurus have sailed either across or in the Aegean Sea?

Samos to Athens

Athens to Colophon

Colophon to Mytilene

Mytilene to Lampsacus

Lampsacus to Athens

But maybe other trips as well?

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### **Post by “Don” of August 27, 2022 at 10:34 PM**

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Just pondering: How many times might Epicurus have sailed either across or in the Aegean Sea?

Samos to Athens

Athens to Colophon

Colophon to Mytilene

Mytilene to Lampsacus

Lampsacus to Athens

But maybe other trips as well?

Display More

That's a good inventory!

There could have been other trips. I vaguely remember that he went to visit one of the Asia Minor/Ionian "gardens" but maybe he sent one of the other founders.

But I get the idea sea travel wasn't to be taken lightly.

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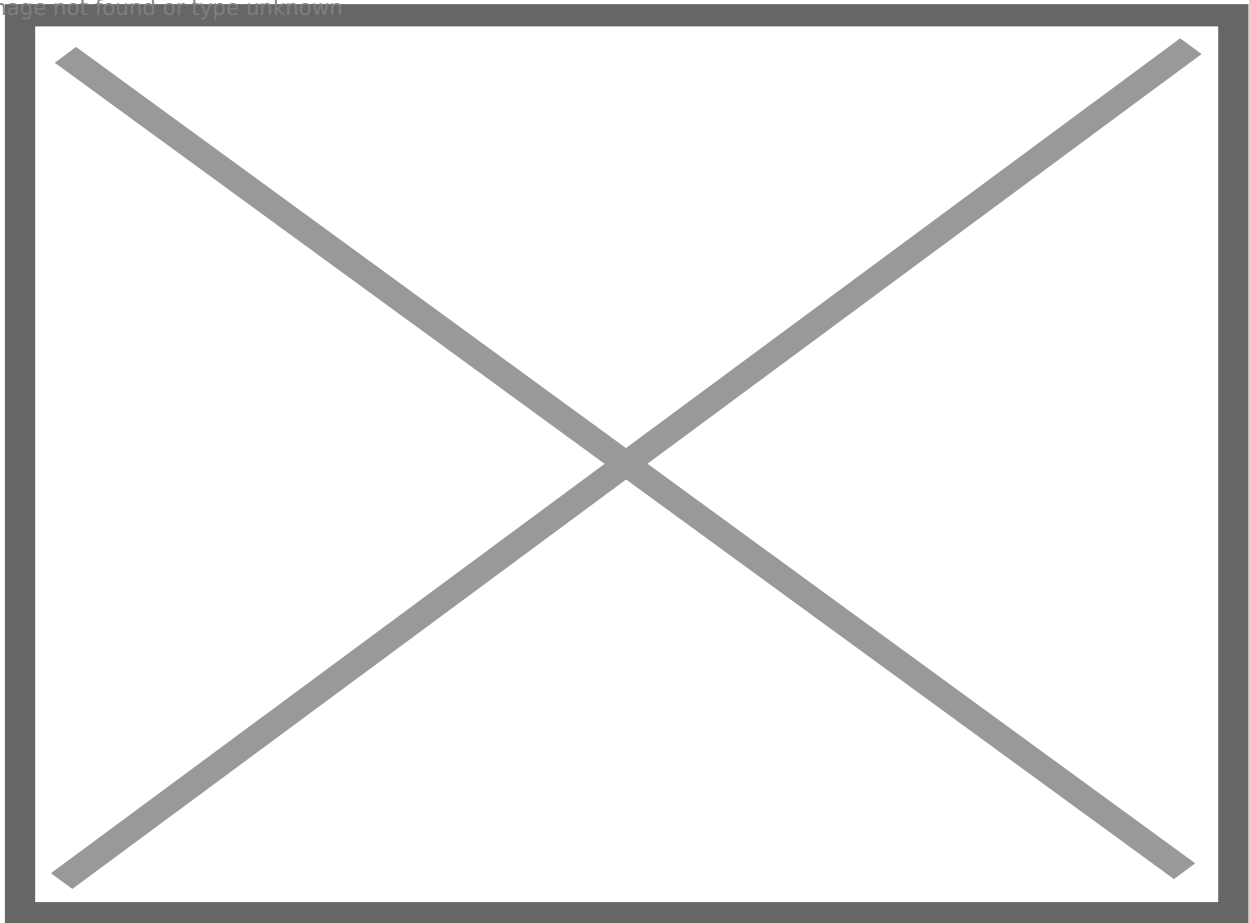
**Post by “Don” of August 28, 2022 at 8:15 AM**

Of potential interest

[Speed Under Sail of Ancient Ships — TAPA 82:136-148 \(1951\)](#)

[DISTANCE AND COMMUNICATION](#)

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