

Lucretius' Expressions of Epicurus' Atomoi

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 4, 2023 at 6:06 PM

I have been translating sections of *De Rerum Natura* (and plan to continue), and I found something interesting I wanted to share, upon which I will likely build later. Lucretius discusses the difficult task of translating scientific Greek vocabulary into Latin metaphors, and I feel that (overwhelmingly) **most** translators gloss over Lucretius' specific innovations by employing the word "atom" or "atoms", which can be misleading for several reasons.

Instead, I found that (*usually*) Munro best preserves Lucretius' linguistic innovations without resorting to contemporary scientific jargon or reducing the poetic flavor to the tone of a textbook.

Latin Words For ATOMI (found in *DRN* I-VI):

CORPORA — “first bodies” (Munro)

CORPORA MATERIALI — “elements of matter” (Munro)

CORPORA PRIMA — “first bodies” (Munro)

CORPORIBUS PRIMIS — “first bodies” (Munro)

CORPORIS — “first body” (Munro)

CORPVSCVLA MATERIALI — “the minute bodies of matter” (Munro)

ELEMENTA — “elements” (Munro)

ELEMENTAQUE PRIMA — “prime elements” (Munro)

ELEMENTIS — “elements” (Munro)

FIGVRAS — “elements” (Munro)

EXORDIA — “beginnings” (Munro)

EXORDIA PRIMA — “first-beginnings” (Munro)

EXORDIA RERVUM — “beginnings of things” (Munro)

GENITALIA CORPORA — “begetting bodies” (Munro)

GENITALIA CORPORA REBVS — “begetting bodies of things” (Munro)

MATERIAI CORPORA — “bodies of matter” (Munro)

MATERIAI CORPORIBVS — “bodies of matter” (Munro)

MATERIEM RERVM — “matter of things” (Munro)

MATERIES AETERNA — “matter everlasting” (Munro)

MINVTIS PERQVAM CORPORIBVS — “exceedingly minute bodies” (Munro)

PRIMAS PARTIS — “primal parts” (Munro)

PRIMASQVE FIGVRAS — “primary elements” (Munro)

PRIMORDIA — “first-beginnings” (Munro)

PRIMORDIA CORPORE — “first elements” (Munro)

PRIMORDIA PRINCIPIORVM — “basic elements” (Humphries)

PRIMORDIA RERVM — “first beginnings of things” (Munro)

PRIMORDIAQVE — “firstlings” (Humphries)

PRIMORVM — “first things” (Munro)

PRINCIPIIS — “primary particles” (Smith)

PRINCIPIIS RERVM — “primary elements of things” (Smith)

PRINCIPIORVM — “primary elements” (Smith)

PRINCIPIORVM CORPORIBVS — “primary particles” (Melville)

PRINCIPIORVM CORPORIS ATQVE ANIMI — “the elements of the body and spirit” (Smith)

SEMINA — “seeds” (Munro)

SEMINA REBVS — “seeds of things” (Munro)

SEMINA RERVM — “seeds of things” (Munro)

SEMINAQVE — “seeds” (Smith)

SEMINE — “seed” (Munro)

SEMINIBVS — “seeds” (Munro)

SEMINIS — “seeds” (Munro)

RERVM PRIMORDIA — “first-beginnings of things”

Of note, lines between 1000-1288 in Book V use SEMINA to refer to male ejaculate fluid, thus, employing literal imagery, creating a necessary, poetic comparison between the generation of the Earth and the generation of a Child through the same, insentient mechanisms; both of which are composed of clumps of eternal matter that get entangled while falling through the void, both of which lead to inextricably vast complexity, coming from simple, primordial seeds.

I plan on reviewing III-VI next, but I thought that I-II would most efficiently provide me with the largest variety of phrases for "atoms" in the ancient context or "subatomic particles" in the modern meaning. (Edit: updated to sixerino)

Post by “Cassius” of February 4, 2023 at 7:13 PM

Thanks Nate. It's been quite a while since I read it, but I recall reading through Munro's notes to his translation, and in fact I think I was even looking at them each week as a means of dividing up episodes by topic when we were first going through the book on the podcast.

I remember thinking to myself that it was clear to me that Munro was much more "pro-Epicurus" than was Bailey, so that it seemed to me that his translation decisions might be more trustworthy given his seeming sympathy to the material. When we look to compare the commentators on the texts to each other, Bailey probably has a wider range of facts to compare to since he lived significantly later than Munro, but I am thinking that Munro's translation decisions deserve a lot of respect. Going further I suppose that today's editions by Martin Ferguson Smith have even more material to draw from, and he smooths out a lot of the awkward text, but Munro to this day seems to me to be the one who was trying to be the most literal, and that makes him very valuable.

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 3, 2023 at 5:11 PM

I believe I have found several places in *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book X* where atoms are referred to something other than ἄτομος (*and declensions thereof*). Here are those found in *Ep. Her.* and *Pyth.*:

ATOMA — “elements” (Bailey), “particles” (Munro)

ΑΤΟΜΟΙ — “atoms” (Bailey)

ΑΤΟΜΟΙΣ — “atoms” (Bailey)

ΑΤΟΜΟΣ — “atom” (Bailey)

ΑΤΟΜΟΥΣ — “first beginnings”, “atoms” (Bailey)

ΑΤΟΜΩΜΟΝ — “atoms” (Bailey)

ΑΤΟΜΩΝ — “atoms” (Bailey)

ΑΤΟΜΩ — “atom” (Bailey)

Here are additional words (I believe) used in extant texts to refer to the eternal, indivisible particles, namely, declensions of **μέρος** (*méros* or "parts"), **ὄγκος** (*ónkos* or "mass"), and **λεπτός** (*leptós* or "minute").

ΛΕΠΤΟΜΕΡΗΣ — “fine particles” (Hicks)

ΣΧΗΜΑΤΙΣΜΟΣ — “atoms” (Hicks)

ΣΧΗΜΑΤΙΣΜΟΥ — “atoms” (Hicks)

ΜΕΡΙΣΙΝ — “certain particles” (Hicks)

ΟΜΟΥΡΗΣΙΝ — “certain particles” (Hicks)

ΟΓΚΟΙ — “particles” (Hicks)

ΟΓΚΟΥΣ — “atoms” or “parts” (Hicks)

ΟΓΚΩΝ — “particles” (Hicks)

Have you come across any other words in ancient Greek that refer to "atoms"?

Post by “Joshua” of June 3, 2023 at 5:42 PM

I see that μέρος (along with ὁμοῖος) is part of the word homeomeria, the idea that everything that exists is made of little particles like itself. Bone is made of bone particles, fire of fire particles, wood of wood particles, etc.

This in contrast to the ideas of the atomists, who thought that a finite set of atomic types, with an infinite number of each type, made up everything and granted their attributes to the

compounds they were part of.

It was this latter idea that George Santayana described as "perhaps the greatest thought that mankind has ever hit upon."

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 9, 2023 at 7:32 AM

I also note his use of ΣΠΕΡΜΑΤΑ or σπέρματα (*spérmata*, "seeds") in *The Lives of Eminent Philosopher X.74*

This makes Lucretius' use of SEMINA more of a *literal* Greek-Latin translation and less of a poetic innovation.